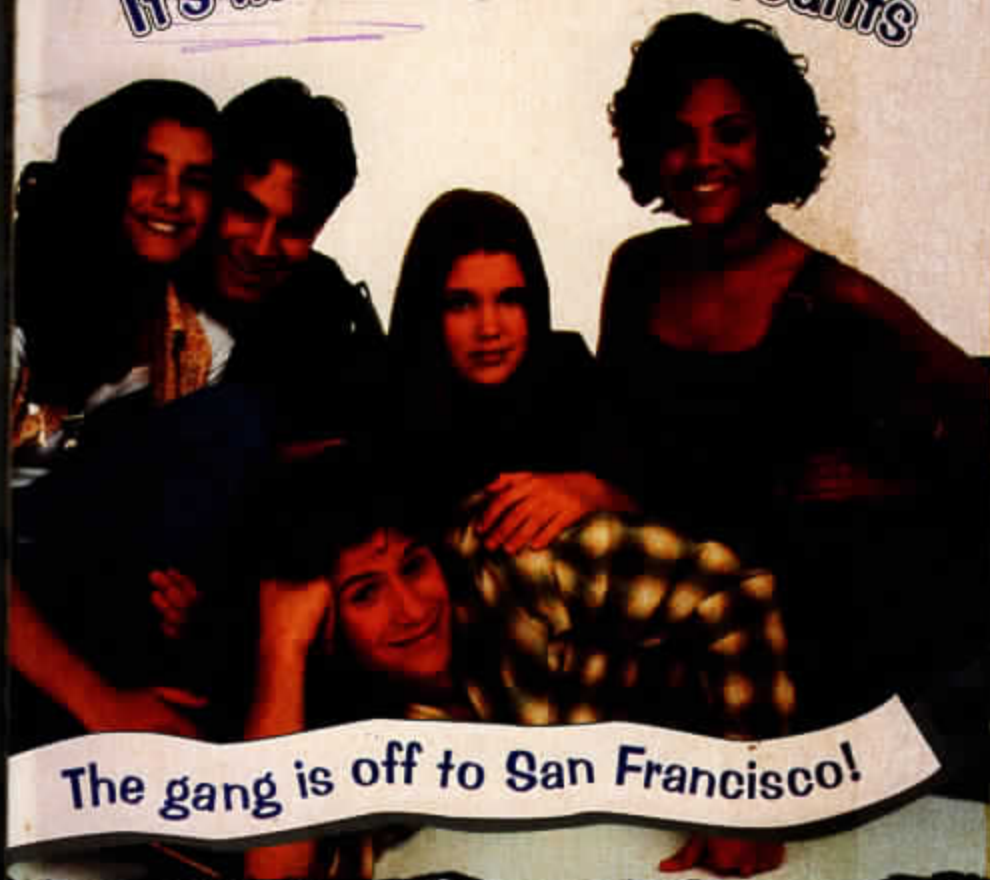


SAVED  
BY THE  
BELL

## The New Class

#8

It's the Thought That Counts



The gang is off to San Francisco!

by Beth Cruise

# It's the Thought That Counts

by Beth Cruise

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To dog lovers everywhere



Exciting fiction about the new class!

- \*1 Trouble Ahead
- \*2 Spilling the Beans
- \*3 Going, Going, Gone!
- \*4 Breaking the Rules
- \*5 Spreading the Word
- \*6 Lights, Camera, Action!
- \*7 May the Best Team Win
- \*8 It's the Thought That Counts
- \*9 Finders, Keepers
- \*10 Franken-Bobby!

chapter

1

"It's going to be awesome," Brian Keller said. His hazel eyes twinkled as he looked around the Max. As usual, Bayside High's favorite hangout was packed. "We'll get to hang out in San Francisco without a real chaperon."

"No kidding," Tommy DeLuca agreed. He folded his muscular arms across his chest. "I'm sure Screech will let us do whatever we want." The guys were chowing down on burgers and fries while they made plans for their upcoming weekend trip.

The gang had recently won a competition on a local game show called *Smarts and Strength* and were about to cash in on their prize—an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco!



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Tommy grinned. "And that means I'll be spending some serious quality time with Lindsay," Tommy added. He smiled as he pictured his girlfriend's long brown hair and dazzling smile. "She's definitely the most beautiful girl in school."

"That's your opinion," Brian replied, cocking his head to one side. "Everyone else knows that Rachel is prettier." Rachel Meyers was the girl of Brian's dreams. Blond. Beautiful. He'd been trying to get her to go out with him for months.

"No way, José," Tommy said with a devilish grin. "And besides, Rachel's madly in love with her college-boy boyfriend. You don't have a chance with her." He took another bite of his cheeseburger and washed it down with a gulp of soda.

"Romantic San Francisco is exactly what I need to get our relationship off the ground," Brian said confidently. "After a hot chocolate and a walk along the wharf, she'll be melting in my arms."

Tommy shook his head and laughed. "You're nuts, Keller," he said.

"Nuts? Nuts! What a great idea!" The guys looked up to see Bobby Wilson standing at the end of the table. He frantically waved a colorful pamphlet in front of their faces. "It's got to have a nutty name."

Brian and Tommy exchanged glances. They had no idea what their friend was talking about, but that

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was nothing new. Bobby had a wacky sense of style and an even wackier sense of logic. His brain always seemed to go in five directions at once.

"What are you talking about?" Brian asked, sliding over so Bobby could sit down.

"The latest Ghirardelli creation, of course," he exclaimed happily.

"Girawhaf?" Tommy asked. He wrinkled his forehead in confusion.

"Gear-ra-dell," Bobby said, carefully pronouncing the name. He plopped his pamphlet down right in a pool of ketchup on Tommy's plate. Goopy red drops splattered across the table.

"Isn't that the chocolate company in San Francisco?" Brian asked as he mopped up the mess with a napkin.

"Righty-o, Einstein," Bobby said. "They're sponsoring a special contest, and I'm going to win it!"

"You're going to spend your weekend in San Francisco doing some sort of contest?" Tommy asked incredulously.

"You bet," Bobby replied. "The winner gets to name a chocolate bar. I'll get a tour of the factory, and a year's supply of candy bars! Not to mention that every girl at Bayside will want to go out with me."

Brian and Tommy exchanged another glance and laughed between mouthfuls of burger. They both



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knew that no matter *what* Bobby did, he'd still have a tough time getting a date!

o o o

"How am I going to fit everything into two suitcases?" Rachel Meyers wailed. She and her friends Lindsay Warner and Megan Jones were walking to the Max after school. "I mean, it's totally unfair for the airlines to have those rules. Don't you think?"

Megan rolled her eyes as Lindsay tried to suppress a giggle. They were used to Rachel's obsessing about her wardrobe and looks. She had more clothes and makeup than anyone they knew. Not to mention boys. She was always "in love" with someone new.

"We're only going for two and a half days," Megan reminded her. Sometimes Megan lost patience with Rachel. After all, Megan was a straight-A student who thought there was more to life than clothes and boys. "You don't have to bring your whole closet."

"But we're going to San Francisco!" Rachel exclaimed. "How am I supposed to know what's hip up there?"

Lindsay patted her friend's arm. "You'll look fine," she assured her.

"I can't wait," Megan said. Her brown eyes sparkled with excitement. "It's going to be a blast! Just think!

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Museums, cable cars, bay views, and great restaurants. We won't be able to decide what to do!"

Lindsay nodded. "It couldn't have happened on a better weekend, either," she said, flipping her long dark braid over her shoulder. "I mean, it's my and Tommy's anniversary on Saturday. We'll get to celebrate it in one of the country's romantic cities!"

Down the block, the Max's neon sign glowed. Megan smiled ruefully as the girls walked toward it. She had recently broken up with Dave Williams and was feeling a little blue. But she was still excited for her best friend. San Francisco *was* a great place for an anniversary.

"What are you giving him for a present?" Rachel asked.

Lindsay grinned. "A two-year subscription to *Cars and Parts*."

"Ugh," Rachel said as they pulled open the door to the diner.

"How romantic," Megan added sarcastically.

"I know, I know," Lindsay said. She scanned the crowded restaurant. "But Tommy loves cars. *Almost* as much as he loves me. I'm just glad he won't be able to work on his Mustang this weekend. It'll be five hundred miles away!"

The girls laughed as they headed over to the booth where the guys were sitting.



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"What's so funny?" Tommy asked. Lindsay sat down next to him, and he gave her hand a squeeze.

"Nothing," she replied innocently. "We were just talking about the great time we're going to have in San Francisco."

"No kidding," Bobby said. "And I want you guys to know that I won't forget you after I win the Ghirardelli contest."

"What is he talking about?" Megan asked. She shot Bobby a look as she pulled up a chair.

"Some contest that's sponsored by a San Francisco chocolate company," Brian explained. "The winner gets to name a candy bar. Of course, Bobby thinks it's his ticket to fame—and girls."

"It can't hurt," Bobby said defensively.

Brian backed down. He couldn't help but feel a little sorry for Bobby. Bobby's only girlfriend, Grizelda Finsecker, had moved away two weeks after they'd started seeing each other. Since then, he hadn't had a single date.

Lindsay snuggled up next to Tommy. "I've got the perfect anniversary present for you," she whispered. "You're going to love it."

"Anniversary?" Tommy's voice trailed off. Lindsay raised an eyebrow. "You didn't forget, did you?" She looked a little hurt. Tommy had forgotten their anniversary the year before, too.

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"Uh . . . no," Tommy replied hastily. "Of course not." He flashed her a smile that deepened the dimple in his chin. "I've got the perfect present for you, too."

Lindsay grinned. "Good. We can exchange gifts when we go out for dinner on Saturday night." Her brown eyes were full of softness as she looked up at him.

"Right," Tommy agreed. But he seemed distant, as if he were thinking about something else.

Across the table, Brian was gazing at Rachel. She pretended to be engrossed in a list she was making. But Brian was sure she was watching him out of the corner of her eye. They were really starting to connect, he could just tell. *In less than two days we'll be kissing by the water, he thought. I'll give her my jacket so she doesn't get chilly. She'll think I'm Mr. Romance.*

"Should I bring two bathing suits or three?" Rachel asked, looking up from her list.

"Bring them all," Brian said. "Maybe we can have a little swimsuit show!"

"A bathing suit competition, all right!" Tommy exclaimed. He reached out to high-five Brian.

Megan rolled her eyes. "Give it up, you guys," she said. "We're not going to the beach, Rachel. You don't need to bring any."

"You never know," Rachel replied seriously. "But I guess two will be enough."



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Just then Samuel Powers, better known as Screech, ambled into the Max. Lindsay waved him over to their table. He was carrying a portable computer under one arm. A stack of papers was tucked under the other. Screech had graduated from Bayside a couple of years before and was now working as Principal Belding's assistant. It was part of his college-education program—he wanted to be a school administrator.

The only problem was, Screech wasn't much of an authority figure. In fact, the gang had a hard time taking him seriously. Who could blame them? With his plaid bow tie, striped shirt, and polka dot suspenders, Screech seemed more like a circus clown.

"Greetings, my fellow travelers," Screech announced as he stepped up to the booth. "I've got some very exciting news!" As he set his computer down on the table, the papers flew out of his hands. They went streaming through the air like confetti.

"Oops," Screech said, bending over to pick them up. He lifted his head to look up at the gang. "Be with you in a moment," he said.

"Let me help you," Lindsay said. She leaned forward and reached for a paper. But Screech slipped on a french fry. He crashed into her and she went sprawling across the floor.

"Oops, sorry!" he exclaimed.

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"That's okay," Lindsay said. Rubbing her bottom, she scrambled to her feet and sat down.

A minute later, Screech held a messy pile of papers. "My itineraries," he announced. "If you could each take one, we can get down to business."

When everyone had a piece of paper, Screech cleared his throat. "It took a lot of organizing, but I've finally figured it out. With this schedule we can see everything San Francisco has to offer in just two and a half days!" he said triumphantly.

The gang glanced at their sheets of paper and gasped. Screech had planned out every single minute of their weekend!

"But Screech," Brian said, holding up a hand. "We were really hoping to—"

"No need to thank me, my man," Screech said, patting Brian on the back. "It's all part of my job as your chaperon."

Grinning, Screech got up from the table. "I'll see you all at eleven o'clock tomorrow in the Bayside parking lot. Mr. Belding is driving us to the airport. Be prompt!"

As Screech walked out the front door, the gang let out a group moan.

"I can't believe it!" Megan said, looking down at her itinerary. "I mean, I want to see the sights, but not like this."

"We may as well be going with Mr. Loomis,"



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Rachel moaned. Mr. Loomis was Bayside's history teacher, and he was known for being strict. "How am I supposed to fit in a facial and a mud wrap?"

"And what about the contest?" Bobby put in.

"So much for freedom," Tommy grumbled. "I thought Screech would be cool to have as a chaperon. Guess I was wrong."

Brian pounded his fist on the table. "We'll just have to get our freedom back," he declared. "We'll revolt!"

"What do you mean?" Rachel asked.

A devious light gleamed in Brian's eyes. "Oh, I think we'll be able to come up with a way to distract our chaperon."

"Right!" Tommy said. "Then we can do whatever we want!"

Suddenly everyone was caught up in Brian's spirit. They began talking excitedly.

"I can visit the de Young Museum," Megan said.

"I can go to Ghirardelli Square first thing," Bobby exclaimed.

"And Tommy and I can have a romantic anniversary," Lindsay added.

It was a plan. First chance they got, they'd leave Screech in the dust!

## chapter

# 2

"Bye!" Mr. Belding said. He waved to the gang as he pulled away from Los Angeles International Airport the next morning. "Have a great time!"

"We will," everybody called back as they headed into the airport with their luggage.

Rachel had so many bags that the boys had to help her.

"I feel like a bellboy," Tommy muttered. His arms strained under the weight of one of Rachel's bags. "What do you have in here, anyway?"

"Just a few necessary items," Rachel replied. "My hair dryer, curlers, an iron . . ." Being careful not to trip on her long gauze skirt, she trudged along behind the boys.



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The whole gang had dressed up for the first day of their trip. Rachel's ribbed top matched her printed skirt perfectly. Megan's bright purple sweater and pleated pants were sure to draw a lot of attention from cute tourist boys. Lindsay dressed more classically—her navy blue pantsuit was perfectly tailored. Screech stood out in the crowd—he sported a polka-dot oxford shirt and a bow tie. Bobby was uncharacteristically subdued in corduroy overalls and a sport coat.

But everyone had a good time teasing Tommy and Brian. They had dressed almost identically! In their khaki pants and red polo shirts, they looked like twins.

Half an hour later, the gang filed onto the plane.

"We're in rows nine, ten, and eleven," Screech said, making his way down the aisle.

Lindsay and Tommy settled in together in the ninth row.

Screech chose the seat directly across the aisle. "Don't forget," he said. "All carry-on luggage must be properly stowed! Place it under the seat in front of you or in the overhead bins."

He shoved his duffel into the overhead bin and grinned. A second later, it fell out and landed on his head. "Ouch!" he cried, rubbing his curly mop. "I think I'll squeeze this down below," he added sheepishly.

Brian wasn't listening. He scooted into the row

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where Rachel was sitting . . . just as Megan dropped a heavy bag onto the seat beside her.

"You got gold bricks in there?" Brian asked, annoyed. He was totally disappointed. How could he sweep Rachel off her feet if he couldn't even get close to her?

"Just a few books I want to read about San Francisco," Megan replied. She chose a few and stowed the bag under the seat.

Brian looked around and realized he'd have to sit with Bobby. Bobby already had his seatbelt on and was intently reading the contest rules for the hundred and tenth time. Sighing, Brian stowed his bag and buckled in. He could already tell that it was going to be a long flight.

A few minutes later, the flight attendants gave the safety demonstration. Soon the plane was zooming down the runway.

"We're taking off!" Lindsay exclaimed as the plane lifted into the air. She reached for Tommy's hand, her slender fingers curling around his strong ones. Turning around in her seat, she looked through the crack. "This weekend is going to be so great," she said to her friends. "I can't wait to get there."

"Me neither," Rachel agreed with a nod. "The dry air in here is murder on my hair, and I was *already* having a bad-hair day."



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Lindsay and Megan giggled. Rachel was so hyper about her looks. Sometimes all they could do was laugh it off. "I'm sure you'll survive," Megan said.

Just then a flight attendant came by with a cart of snacks and beverages.

"Honey roasted!" Screech crowed, eyeing the packets of peanuts. "Can I have two?"

"Sure," the flight attendant replied. She handed him the little packets.

Screech opened one and popped a peanut in his mouth. "Amazing," he said. "How do they get the bees to coat all those little nuts?"

Lindsay giggled and took a sip of apple juice. Then she turned to Tommy. "Give me a hint about my present," she said, her brown eyes shining.

Tommy coughed, choking on a peanut.

"Just a little one," she prodded, squeezing his hand.

"I can't," he admitted.

Lindsay's eyes widened with curiosity. "Why not?"

"Because that would spoil it," Tommy replied quickly. The truth was, he'd been trying to come up with an idea for Lindsay's gift since yesterday afternoon. And he hadn't thought of a single thing. With their anniversary only a day away, he was beginning to panic.

"Oh, Tommy, that's so sweet." Lindsay leaned her head on his chest. "You want it to be a real surprise."

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*It's a surprise, all right, Tommy thought, looking out the window. It's such a surprise that even I don't even know what it is.*

"Whatever it is, I'm going to love it," Lindsay said. "Because it'll be from you. And the gift isn't the important thing. It's really the thought that counts."

Two rows back, Bobby was muttering the candy-bar contest rules under his breath.

"Do you have to have those memorized to compete?" Brian asked, blowing out a sigh. Bobby was starting to get on his nerves.

"You do?" Bobby looked up, his face stricken with panic. "Where does it say that?" He bent over the piece of paper, searching for the nonexistent rule.

"Relax, man," Brian said. He patted Bobby's arm. Bobby was one of the first kids he'd met when he transferred to Bayside. Most of the time he was fun to hang out with. But the guy was definitely a little on the nutty side. Especially when he got his mind set on something like a contest.

Brian was glad when the pilot finally announced that they were beginning their descent into the San Francisco airport.

Rachel leaned forward to look out the window, but all she could see was a white mist. "I can't see a thing," she complained. "It's too foggy."

Across the aisle, Screech studied a map. "We're



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approaching from the south, so you wouldn't be able to see much of the city anyway," he said.

"I hope it's sunny downtown," Lindsay said. "I want this whole weekend to be perfect."

The plane touched down in a smooth landing and soon coasted to a stop at the gate. They sprang out of their seats, eager to start the weekend.

A half hour later, the gang boarded a van that would take them directly to the hotel.

"In one of my books it said that the Cartwright Hotel is really nice," Megan said as she plopped down into a seat next to Lindsay. "And it's right in Union Square, where there's lots of action."

Screech nodded excitedly. "Your books combined with my on-line travel agent will make sure we hit all the right places!" He pointed to his tiny, hand-held computer.

At first there wasn't much to see out the van windows. But when they got closer to the city, the bus took an elevated freeway, and suddenly the city came into view below them. Soft-colored buildings and skyscrapers lined the hilly city streets. And the deep blue bay sparkled behind them.

"It's so cool!" Tommy exclaimed, pressing his nose to the window for a better look. "Check out that building!" Sunlight glittered on a skinny glass pyramid.

"That must be the TransAmerica Pyramid," Screech

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told them. "It's a famous landmark, built in 1972."

It was a beautiful, sunny day in the city. When the van pulled up to the hotel entrance, the gang quickly unloaded their bags as Screech went to check in. When he was finished he handed everyone their room keys.

"Okay, troops," Screech said, punching some numbers into his portable computer. "We've got exactly thirteen and a half minutes to freshen up. Then it's off to Alcatraz for our first exciting tour!"

The gang exchanged glances. They all wanted to visit the prison, but they were dying for some free time to explore on their own. Was it time to put their escape plan into action?

"Uh, Vice Principal Screech," Brian said. He stepped forward and put a hand on Screech's shoulder. "Visiting Alcatraz is a fabulous idea. But don't you think such a stellar attraction deserves more time than just an hour or two? Maybe we should go tomorrow instead."

Screech wrinkled his forehead and tilted his head in thought. Then he checked his watch. "Well, that would definitely skew our perfectly planned schedule," he said, sounding a little glum. "But you do have a point." He looked around at the rest of the gang. Everyone was looking at him with wide, hopeful eyes. Tommy and Brian were nodding like crazy.



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"All right," he said gallantly. "We'll postpone the Alcatraz trip."

"Great!" everyone chorused as Screech looked down at his computer. He punched a few keys, trying to figure out what the best activity for the afternoon would be.

"Let's see," he murmured. "We could go to Coit Tower. Or maybe the Cable Car Museum. No, wait . . . it's a nice day for a walk in Golden Gate Park. And then there's always Fisherman's Wharf." He brought up a few more screens, then sighed. "What do you guys think?"

When he didn't get an answer, Screech looked around. His audience was gone.

He was standing in the hotel lobby, talking to himself. "Uh, guys?" he said. "Hey, where did everybody go?"

## chapter

# 3

"**S**he's gonna kill me," Tommy complained as the guys settled into their room. "I mean, it's our two-year anniversary. Two years and no gift!"

"Chill out," Brian said as he tossed his duffel onto his bed. "We'll go shopping this afternoon. How hard can that be?"

"We're in Union Square," Bobby added, pointing to the map that was spread out on the bed. "We're surrounded by department stores."

"I can't buy Lindsay's present from a department store," Tommy said. "It's got to be something *special*. Personal. Thoughtful." Her words rang in his mind. "It's the thought that counts."

Tommy leaned over the edge of the bed and



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squinted at the map. Bobby had circled Ghirardelli Square in red ink and drawn little stars all around it. But other than that, nothing jumped out at him. "Does it say where the gift shops are?" he asked.

"Uh, no," Bobby admitted.

Tommy sat down with a sigh. "I'm doomed," he said gloomily. "She'll probably break up with me."

"You're crazy, man," Brian said, slugging Tommy on the arm. "Lindsay is completely nuts about you. I'm not really sure *why*, but—"

Brian was interrupted by a knock on the door. "Do you think it's Screech?" he asked. "I mean, he knows where we are."

"Hey, you guys!" a sweet voice came through the door. It was Lindsay. "Open up."

Brian opened the door, and the girls piled into the room.

"We came to tell you we're going shopping at Pier 39," Rachel said. She held up a San Francisco guidebook. "Over one hundred and ten sensational stores," she read.

"You don't mind, do you?" Lindsay asked, looking up at Tommy. "I mean, our anniversary isn't until tomorrow."

"I don't mind at all," Tommy replied quickly. But then he thought he'd spoken too fast. Lindsay looked a tiny bit hurt. "I want you to be able to spend some

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time with Rachel and Megan, too," he added. "And besides, I'll see you tonight. We're all going to Chinatown at seven, remember?"

Lindsay nodded and gave Tommy a smooch on the cheek. "I'll see you later."

"Bye, guys," Rachel called out cheerfully as the girls headed out the door.

Brian sighed as he watched her go. She was a knockout, all right. He didn't want to let her out of his sight. *And I won't*, he thought as the door closed behind the girls.

"Quick!" he told Tommy. "Get your jacket. We're outta here!"

"We are?" Tommy asked, confused.

Brian quickly grabbed his room key and his wallet. "We're going to follow the girls to Pier 39 and make like mannequins. We'll see what Lindsay and Rachel like. Then we can buy it!"

"Do you know how to get there?" Tommy asked.

Brian glanced at the map. "Well . . ." he said. Then he straightened up. "Who needs a map when you've got three lovely travel guides! Hurry up before we miss them!"

"See you later, Bobby," Tommy said as he and Brian dashed out the door.

Bobby sighed. "Love," he said. Then he remembered his plan. If he could win this contest, girls



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would notice him! You've got a mission to accomplish! he told himself.

He stood up, neatly folded the map, and tucked it into his pocket. "And now for the rest of my trip tools." He reached into his duffel bag and pulled out a compass, a pair of binoculars, a measuring tape, and a Polaroid camera. "You can never be too prepared," he murmured.

Grabbing his room key, Bobby headed for the door. But when he opened it, he nearly bumped into Screech.

"Ah, there you are," Screech said. He sounded a little glum, and Bobby suddenly remembered that they'd ditched him. "Where did everybody go?"

"Shopping, I think," Bobby said. Screech's bow tie was drooping, and his eyes were sad. Bobby felt bad for Screech. It was pretty mean of the gang—himself included—to take off like that.

"Hey, nice compass," Screech said, leaning down to get a closer look.

Bobby grinned. He took the compass from around his neck and handed it to Screech. "She's a Silva Ranger Type 15CL," he explained. He tapped the plastic face. "This baby could steer me out of a cave."

Bobby watched as Screech fiddled with the compass. *Maybe Screech would be a good partner for the contest, he thought. After all, there will probably be riddles to solve, and he's practically a genius!*

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"So where are you off to?" Screech asked.

Bobby told Screech about the Ghirardelli contest, and Screech's eyes lit up. "A tour of the real factory?" he exclaimed.

Bobby nodded. "Want to be my partner?" he asked.

"I'd love to!" Screech crowed. He leaned forward excitedly. "Do you think they'd let us lick the giant chocolate beaters?"

Bobby shrugged. "We can ask."

"Awesome," Screech said. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

o o o

"We can't go in there!" Tommy whispered fiercely. He and Brian stood outside Gloria's Global Boutique. Through the glass he could see the girls sorting through racks of clothes. "It's a women's store. And they might see us!"

Brian rolled his eyes. Sometimes Tommy took this macho stuff too far. "It's a pretty big store," he said. "And you're buying a present for your girlfriend, remember? Where were you planning on buying it? Hardware Helper or Auto World?"

Tommy peeked through the window and saw that the girls were looking at some skirts and blouses in the rear of the store. They had their backs to the door. "All right," he conceded as he quietly opened



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the door. "But let's make it fast."

The boys sneaked into the store. Moving along the side that was farthest from the girls, they tried to look interested in the merchandise.

"This is a lovely scarf," Brian said in a girlie whisper. He held it up to Tommy's face, and the gauzy material tickled his nose. "It goes perfectly with your eyes."

Tommy batted it away. "Just keep an eye on the girls," he growled.

A moment later, Tommy heard Lindsay ask the clerk about a pair of earrings in a glass case. "Aren't they beautiful?" she crooned. "I just love these little blue stones."

*She loves them!* Tommy thought. He clutched a rack of dresses and tried to get a better look. But he couldn't see a thing. *I've got to see them!* He leaned out even further. But when he looked down, he saw that the rack was falling over!

Crash! The hangers clanged together as everything fell to the floor in a heap.

Startled, the girls and the clerk turned toward the noise. But Tommy had already bolted to the back of the store and into one of the changing rooms.

His heart pounded as he sat down on the little bench inside. Had Lindsay seen him? There was no way to know for sure.

"How're those dresses fitting?" A high-pitched

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voice called through the lattice door a minute later. Tommy looked around nervously and saw two dresses hanging on a hook by the dressing room door. The store clerk was talking to him!

"Hello?" the voice called again. "I was asking about those dresses." As Tommy watched in horror, the dressing-room door started to open.

Tommy threw himself against the door with a thud. "Uh, they're a little tight," he said, his voice a high-pitched squeak.

"I'll get you a larger size," the clerk said.

"No! No. That's okay," Tommy sputtered.

Suddenly the clerk started laughing. It took Tommy a moment to recognize the laugh. Brian! He threw open the door and saw his friend doubled over with laughter. "Not funny, Keller," he growled.

"You should have heard your voice," Brian said between gasps. "They're a little tight. It was hilarious."

Tommy scowled. "Are the girls gone?" he asked.

Brian nodded.

"Good. Let's go." He headed over to the jewelry case. Still snickering, Brian followed.

"Can I see those earrings?" Tommy asked the clerk. He pointed to the only pair with blue stones.

"These are popular today," the clerk said. She pulled them out of the case.

Tommy picked up one of the earrings and knew



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right away that they were the perfect gift. The blue stones would sparkle against Lindsay's dark hair. He checked the price tag, and his heart sank. They cost over a hundred dollars!

Tommy opened his wallet and counted his money. Just as he'd thought, he had only thirty dollars. He was almost ninety dollars short, including the sales tax.

Next to him, Brian was eyeing a crystal necklace. "Rachel would love this," he said. And what better way to show her how much he cared than a piece of jewelry? She'd *really* fall for him then.

"I just need thirty-five smackers," Brian said. "Can you lend me some cash?"

Tommy shook his head. "Are you kidding? I need *ninety* dollars. And it's our anniversary. And, anyway, you've been totally broke ever since you lost your job at Pickin' Chicken. How would you pay me back?"

"You've got a point," Brian admitted. Tommy looked at the earrings again. They were perfect, all right. This was a total bummer! He had to come up with the money.

But how?

## chapter

# 4

"I'd like a hot chocolate with extra marshmallows, please," Bobby told the waitress. He and Screech were in a coffee shop in Ghirardelli Square. They'd filled out their official entry form and were having a powwow before heading back to the hotel.

"And I'll have the same, with a scoop of banana ice cream," Screech added. The waitress gave Screech a strange look, but didn't say anything. She just jotted the order down and headed back to the kitchen.

As soon as she had left, Bobby pulled out the official list of contest rules and began to read. "It starts right here tomorrow morning at nine," he said excitedly. "They'll give us a clue. And the answer will



## Saved by the Bell • The New Class

lead us to a famous San Francisco sight, where there'll be another clue."

"Clues, eh?" Screech echoed, scratching his chin thoughtfully. "So it's sort of like a scavenger hunt."

Bobby nodded. "It doesn't say how many places we'll go to, though."

"Two hot chocolates," the waitress said as she stepped up to the table with two steaming mugs. "One with ice cream." She set the mugs on the table along with napkins and spoons.

When she had left again, Screech leaned across the table. "We're in luck! I'm an expert at scavenger hunts!" he exclaimed.

"Really?" Bobby asked. He was glad he'd asked Screech to be his partner. They were going to make a terrific team. "So you've done lots of them?"

"Every year," Screech boasted, leaning back in his chair so the front legs came up off the floor. "At my friends' birthday parties. One year, on my seventh birthday, I even hosted one."

Screech smiled at the memory and continued. "I went around the neighborhood hiding pieces of my mother's jewelry. But I did such a good job, no one could find them. Not even me! Boy, was I in a lot of trouble. . . ."

Bobby shook his head. Screech was a lot of fun, but he was definitely a weird dude.

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"Hey, look at this!" Screech said. He picked up an old-fashioned compact off the floor. It had the initial *M* engraved on it.

An old lady sitting at the next table turned around. "Oh, I believe that's mine," she said.

Screech looked up at the lady and smiled. She was plump and had rosy cheeks and bright blue eyes. She reminded Screech of his grandmother Rosie, who had died last year. "It was on the floor," he said. He got to his feet.

The woman smiled up at him. She and her friend both wore floppy flowered hats. "I'm always losing things," she admitted.

The woman sitting next to her nodded in agreement. She was tiny, with a neat bun in her hair and brown eyes. "Marie would lose her very own head if it weren't attached to her neck!"

"Serina!" the first woman swatted her friend's arm playfully.

"I'm sure that's not true," Screech said graciously. He put the compact on the table. "Enjoy your coffee," he said, then sat back down in his chair.

Bobby was reading the rules again.

"I think we should ask the rest of the gang to come along tomorrow," Screech said. He took a sip of hot banana chocolate. "It'll sort of make up for missing out on the great itinerary I'd planned."



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Bobby nodded. "But we'll have to tell them that this isn't some sightseeing expedition. It's a *mission*. We've got to win."

Screech nodded gravely. "Right." He looked around the restaurant. "Our competition could be in here this very minute," he said.

Bobby's eyes widened. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his minibinoculars. Putting them up to his face, he carefully scanned the room. He saw a bearded man reading the paper in the corner. A teenage couple smooching in a booth. And a middle-aged woman eating a banana split. "The enemy could be anywhere," he said seriously. "Well," he added, "except maybe the cute ladies behind us."

Screech nodded. "Aren't they sweet? And I love their hats!" he said quietly.

But just as Bobby turned around to look, he heard something that chilled him to the bone.

"I just hope we win that contest, Serina," Marie was saying. "For Dick's sake."

"So do I," Serina replied. She reached out and patted her friend's hand.

"He would've sold his soul to see the inside of a real, true chocolate factory," Marie said wistfully. "And I just know he's looking down from heaven right now."

Bobby whipped his head back around. "Correction," he whispered to Screech. "We especially

## It's the Thought That Counts

have to keep an eye on the old ladies behind us. And I don't think they're so cute anymore, either!"

o o o

"Don't worry," Brian said as he and Tommy climbed aboard a bus that would take them back to the hotel. "Where there's a will, there's a way."

"What will?" Tommy asked. "Did your grandmother die? Did she leave you any money?"

"Not *that* kind of will," Brian said, shaking his head. "The kind of will that makes things happen."

"We don't need will. We need a miracle," Tommy said. "We've only got twenty-four hours to make a hundred and ten dollars." He slumped down in his seat. The more he thought about it, the worse he felt.

Brian gazed out the window as the bus drove along the waterfront. Sunlight glistened off the bay. San Francisco was a beautiful, romantic city. If he couldn't win Rachel here, he was a total loser. And that necklace could only help his cause.

*Don't worry, he told himself. You'll think of something.*

The bus dropped them off at Market Street. Tommy could have sworn that the driver smirked as they walked off. *It must be these matching outfits, he thought. We should have changed!*

"Gee," Brian said, looking at his watch. "It's



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already quarter to seven. Maybe we should just wait in the lobby for everybody."

Tommy nodded. But when they turned a corner on Sutter Street, they saw an entire busload of women heading into the Cartwright Hotel. THE WARBLING CLEMENTINES, a sign on the side of the bus announced.

"We're being invaded by a flock of songbirds!" Tommy said.

"But check out that red-haired robin!" Brian said. A beautiful redhead was moving toward the hotel door, and Brian was hot on her heels.

Tommy followed, keeping his eyes peeled for Lindsay. It wasn't easy, because the lobby was packed. There were piles of luggage everywhere, and a huge line at the check-in counter. The receptionist was handing out keys as fast as she could while the bellhops scrambled to keep up.

"I've lost her!" Brian moaned, scanning the crowd. "She was right here a minute ago." He was standing near a podium at the bellman's station.

"You never had her, Keller," Tommy corrected with a grin.

Just then he spotted a bellman's cap on top of the podium. Just for fun, he picked it up and set it on his head. It was a perfect fit. "Your bags, sir," he said in a clipped British accent. He leaned forward in a little bow, and Brian laughed.

## It's the Thought That Counts

As Tommy straightened, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and found himself face-to-face with a pair of beautiful green eyes. They belonged to a lovely young blond woman, who was standing next to the redhead Brian had been chasing. Both girls smiled at him expectantly.

Whoa, Tommy thought. *What's going on?* Girls didn't usually come up to him like this. Except his friends. And Lindsay, of course.

"Here's our luggage," the blond girl said. She gestured to her bags. "We're going out for awhile, but would like these taken up now." She held out the room key and a five-dollar bill.

As a bellhop hurried by, Tommy realized why she had approached him. All the bellhops wore khaki pants and red polo shirts. With the hat on, he must look just like them!

"But I'm not—" Tommy started, then felt someone stomp on his foot.

"Of course, ladies," Brian said in his smooth Swiss accent. "We'll take them up right away."

The redhead gave him a doubtful look. "We were talking to *him*," she said, lightly poking Tommy's biceps. With that, she and her friend turned and walked away.

Brian picked up one of the bags and started toward the elevator.



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"Are you crazy?" Tommy exclaimed. "We don't work here!"

"A hundred and ten dollars in twenty-four hours," Brian replied with a devilish grin.

Tommy's eyes widened as he realized what Brian was thinking. "No way," he said. "No way, José."

"Don't you get it? We're dressed just like them! It was meant to be, my man," he crowed. "Meant to be."

Brian pressed the UP button on the elevator, and the doors slid open. "Do you want to give those earrings to Lindsay or not?" he asked pointedly. He stepped into the elevator and turned around.

Tommy stood in the bustling lobby for a second. Then, in a rush, he grabbed the remaining bag and jumped into the elevator as the doors began to close.

"We don't know the first thing about being bell-boys," he protested.

"It's nothing we can't handle," Brian said firmly. "You carry a few bags. You collect a few tips."

Tommy shook his head and looked up at the elevator ceiling. "This isn't a good idea," he said.

The elevator doors opened on the third floor, and they stepped into the hall. "Suit yourself," Brian said as he walked toward the girls' room. "But Rachel is going to love that crystal necklace."

Tommy was silent as he followed Brian down the hall. This was another one of Keller's crazy schemes.

## It's the Thought That Counts

And Brian had a talent for getting into trouble.

On the other hand, it *was* his anniversary tomorrow. And Lindsay adored those earrings.

"Okay," he said as Brian set the bags down in front of room three fifteen. "I'll do it."

"Great," Brian said, giving Tommy a high five. "It'll be a piece of cake. You'll see."

Tommy wanted to believe him. But deep down inside he wasn't so sure. *It's only for twenty-four hours*, he assured himself. *What could happen?*



chapter

5

That night at dinner, the gang enjoyed fantastic Chinese food. Bite-sized dumplings filled with meat and vegetables. Cold sesame noodles. Crispy deep-fried spicy chicken. Stir-fried noodles and vegetables. And sweet-and-sour shrimp.

"This is delicious," Lindsay said. She deftly picked up a shrimp with her chopsticks. "It was a great idea to come here, Screech."

"Hmm-mm," Bobby agreed through a mouthful of sesame noodles. He slurped them into his mouth, splattering sesame sauce all over his face.

"I love Chinese food," Screech said. He was trying to stab a dumpling with a chopstick, but it kept sliding all over his plate. "My friend Zack Morris and

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used to come here all the time during our first year at Cal U. We practically lived on *mu shu* pork." Giving in, he picked up the dumpling with his fingers and popped it into his mouth.

"How are you supposed to eat these things, anyway?" Tommy asked. He held a *mu shu* pancake in his hand and was looking at it curiously.

"Allow me to demonstrate," Screech boasted. "You take a pancake . . ." He picked up one of the thin flour pancakes and gingerly set it on his plate. "And then take some hoisin sauce . . ." Screech reached for the small bowl of the purple sauce that was in the middle of the table. But as he picked it up, he knocked over a cup of tea.

"Whoa," Brian said. He reached out and grabbed it just as scalding hot tea began to spill all over his plate.

"And spread it all over the pancake." Everyone watched as Screech dumped half the bowl of the sauce onto his plate.

"Do you really need that much?" Megan asked.

"No, no," Screech said, shaking his head. "This is just the way I like it."

Everyone at the table nodded knowingly. Screech had the weirdest taste in food of anybody they knew.

"Then you just put the *mu shu* on top and roll it up." With a flourish, Screech put several spoonfuls of juicy sautéed vegetables and meat onto the pan-



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cake and rolled it up. "And the best part," he finished, "is that you eat it with your fingers." He leaned back and lifted the pancake roll to his mouth. As he bit into it, a wad of juice squirted out . . . and dripped onto his lap.

"Need a napkin?" Rachel asked. She held one out to him.

"Yes, please," Screech said sheepishly.

"So listen, you guys," Bobby said. "We really need your help with the contest tomorrow."

"We?" Rachel asked.

"Screech and I," Bobby explained. "We're partners."

"I know you were all looking forward to our big day of sightseeing," Screech said. He was still mopping up *mu shu* juice. "But I thought that since this contest will take us all over the city to the different sights, we could kill two birds with one stone."

"Screech!" Rachel exclaimed. "I don't want to kill any birds!"

"It's just an expression, Rachel," Lindsay explained, patting her friend's arm. "It means we can accomplish two things at once."

"Oh, right," Rachel said, nodding. "I knew that." Then she looked confused. "What are we going to accomplish?"

"Seeing the city and winning the contest!" Bobby replied. "All we have to do is figure out where the clues

## It's the Thought That Counts

tell us to go. Then we have to get there—fast! And with Screech leading the way, it'll be a piece of cake. He knows San Francisco like the back of his hand."

"So it's like a scavenger hunt," Megan said.

"Correctamundo," Bobby said, grinning happily.

"That sounds like fun," Lindsay said. "When does it start?"

"Nine o'clock," Screech said. "So we should leave the hotel at eight fifteen, just to be safe."

"Eight fifteen!" Rachel objected. "How am I supposed to do my weekly at-home minispa by then? My eyes will be too puffy for me to even start before eight."

"You can do it in the afternoon or something," Megan said. "Don't worry, guys. This does sound like fun. We'll be ready."

Lindsay leaned in close to Tommy. "Maybe tomorrow we can sneak away from the group and go for a walk or something," she said. "Just the two of us."

"Yeah," Tommy replied. "Maybe." He looked across the table at Brian, who was casually eating a plateful of General Tso's chicken. How were they supposed to help out with the contest and be bellboys? Tomorrow was going to be a very tricky day. . . .

o o o

After dinner, the gang walked the few short blocks back to the hotel. It was a beautiful night.



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The air was crisp and cool, and the neon lights in the restaurant windows lit up the street. Lindsay and Tommy strolled along a few feet behind the gang. "Can you carry my room key?" Lindsay asked. "I don't have any pockets."

"Sure," Tommy replied. He slipped the key into his pocket.

"That was a great dinner, Screech," Megan said as the gang made their way down Waverly Place.

"Yeah," Brian patted his stomach. "A little too great. I'm stuffed."

"You shouldn't have had that last *mu shu* pork," Rachel teased.

"Ah, but the pancake was calling to me," Brian said. "I couldn't just leave it there, all alone on an empty table." He flashed Rachel a smile, and she grinned.

"Well, thanks for suggesting Chinatown, Screech," Lindsay said. "It was a terrific idea."

Everyone murmured their agreement as they trooped into the hotel. But as soon as Tommy was through the revolving door, he saw the two girls from that afternoon. They were sitting on a couch in the lobby, reading magazines.

*I can't let them see me!* he thought frantically. He looked around for a place to hide. But it was too late. One of the girls—the redhead—looked right at him. She was getting up from her chair!

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Tommy had to do something in the next two seconds or he'd be in big trouble.

He grabbed Lindsay's arm. Walking as fast as he could, he steered her toward the elevator.

"Tommy, be careful!" Lindsay said. "You're going to yank my arm out of its socket!"

The rest of the gang had gone ahead, so the elevator car was empty. Tommy looked behind him. The redhead was coming his way!

Pulling Lindsay into the elevator, he pressed the button for the fourth floor.

"Hold the elevator!" the redhead called out.

Tommy pressed the DOOR CLOSE button, and the doors slid closed in her face.

Whew, Tommy thought. *That was close!*

Lindsay gasped. "Tommy DeLuca, that was mean!"

"It's almost my anniversary," Tommy replied. He wrapped Lindsay in a hug. "Can you blame me for wanting a romantic elevator ride with my girl?"

Lindsay whacked him on the arm. But she was smiling as she looked up at him. "Nope," she said with a giggle. "I guess I can't."

o o o

The next morning, the girls knocked on the guys' door at quarter to eight. But when Brian answered it, he was still in his pajamas.



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"You guys aren't ready?" Rachel asked incredulously. Brian backed up, and the girls stepped into the room and closed the door.

"I mean, if I can give up my minispa, you guys should be able to take a shower and get dressed," Rachel added.

"Sorry," Brian said. "Tommy and I were up half the night with stomach cramps and nausea." He clutched his stomach and gave a little moan.

"It must have been that *mu shu* pork," Tommy added weakly. He was lying in his bed, the covers up to his neck.

"You poor things!" Rachel cried.

Lindsay hurried over to the bed and sat down next to Tommy. "Does it hurt?" she asked.

Tommy nodded. "It was a rough night," he said plaintively. "My stomach is killing me."

Lindsay reached for his hand. He didn't look pale or anything, but she was sure he still felt awful.

She sighed sadly. Here it was her anniversary, and her boyfriend had the stomach flu. Talk about bad timing! She knew it wasn't his fault, of course. But she was still upset.

Tommy saw the expression on Lindsay's face, and his heart went out to her. *I should just tell her the truth right now*, he thought. But then he remembered those earrings. *I'll make it up to her*, he told

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himself. *And anyway, it's only for one day . . . even if it does happen to be our anniversary.*

"Should we call a doctor?" Lindsay asked.

"No!" Brian practically shouted.

The three girls turned to look at him curiously.

"I mean," he added hastily, "I'm feeling better already. We just need to stay in bed and rest for a while."

"I can stay here with you," Lindsay offered. "We should spend the day together, even if you *are* sick. I can get you guys some ginger ale and magazines, and—"

"No," Tommy said, a little more firmly than he'd meant to. Lindsay looked at him quizzically.

"I mean, I'd hate for you to lose out on your chance to see San Francisco because of me. Plus I'd probably be sleeping or getting sicker. If I rest, I'm sure I'll feel better in time for our dinner tonight," he added. "I've made reservations at a great Italian restaurant up in Russian Hill. It's going to be perfect."

Lindsay smiled. "Okay," she said. She leaned down and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"What about Bobby?" Megan asked.

"He's already downstairs with Screech," Brian answered with a faint grin. "I think they're having a strategy session."

"Brother," Megan murmured as the girls headed



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for the door. "You'd think they were competing for the Nobel Prize."

"Well, we'd better get down there or we won't have time to eat," Rachel said. "And I'm starved."

A minute later, the door closed behind the girls, and Tommy sprang out of bed. Underneath the covers, he was dressed in his "bellman's" uniform. He pulled his bellman's cap out of a drawer and set it on his head.

"All right!" Brian said. "That was a piece of cake."

Phase one of their great plan was accomplished. They were ready for phase two.

## chapter

# 6

"I'm going to take a quick shower," Brian said, heading into the bathroom. "Then we'll get downstairs and start collecting tips."

"Right," Tommy said. While he waited for Brian, he pulled some hotel stationery out of a drawer. He wanted to write Lindsay an anniversary note. She'd seemed really sad when the guys said they weren't going along on the scavenger hunt, and he wanted to cheer her up.

Uncapping his pen, Tommy tried to think of something romantic to write. "Roses are red, violets are blue," he wrote. "You're cuter than a carburetor, and cuddlier, too!" He read it over and wrinkled his nose. That wasn't right. Lindsay wouldn't be too crazy about being compared to a car engine. Tommy crumpled up



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the piece of paper and tossed it into the trash.

On a clean sheet, he tried again. "Roses are red, daisies are yellow, I sure am one lucky fellow!" *That's a little better*, he thought. But it still wasn't quite right.

"I'm no poet, that's for sure," he said out loud. He heard Brian turn off the water in the shower. He had to come up with something soon. He didn't want Brian to think he was a total wimp. Tommy leaned over the page and began to write. A minute later, he sat back and smiled:

ROSES ARE RED  
VIOLETS ARE BLUE  
YOU'RE THE HOTTEST CATCH EVER  
THAT SURE IS TRUE!

It wasn't Shakespeare, but it would have to do.

Brian came out of the bathroom already dressed. "I'm almost ready," he said. "Just give me a sec to throw on my shoes and socks."

Tommy folded the piece of paper neatly in half, then slid it into a small envelope. *Perfect*, he thought. He put the note into his pocket so he could slip it under her door later. *This will let her know exactly how I feel.*

"This hat keeps falling over my eyes!" Brian complained. He and Tommy were in the lobby. They'd

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ventured down to the basement and found him a bellman's cap. But it was too big.

"Forget the hat," Tommy said. He looked around. Compared to yesterday afternoon, the lobby was dead. "We've got to worry about making some tips."

"Right," Brian agreed.

"I don't see too many customers, though," Tommy added.

Just then Lindsay's voice echoed through the empty lobby. And Screech's curly head appeared above the dining room's wooden divider.

"Hide!" Tommy whispered hoarsely, grabbing Brian's sleeve and pulling him behind a large plant next to the bellman's station.

"What's the matter?" Brian asked.

"It's the gang!" Tommy explained. He peered out from behind the plant.

Brian peeked out from the other side.

"Lindsay is looking right at us!" Tommy exclaimed.

She took a few steps forward and squinted.

"She's coming this way!" he added frantically. "I'm doomed!"

But a moment later, Lindsay shook her head. She turned around and followed the gang out the door.

"That was close," Brian said.

"No kidding. I'm beginning to wish you hadn't



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talked me into this," Tommy grumbled. It seemed as if there was a close call around every corner.

"We'll really have to keep a lookout," Brian said. "For the gang and hotel staff."

"Ahem," came a voice behind them.

Brian and Tommy turned around and found themselves looking into the beady eyes of a large, beefy man. RUSTY RODGERS, ASSISTANT MANAGER, his name tag said.

Rusty's eyes narrowed even more when he saw the boys' faces. "I don't believe I know you boys," he said suspiciously. "Just what do you think you're doing here?"

"Working for tips?" Tommy said hesitantly.

"We're the new part-time help," Brian added smoothly. He flashed the man a smile. "With all those fussy women who arrived yesterday afternoon, the manager thought you could use some extra bellboys."

Rusty sighed heavily. "Snuffington," he muttered. "That man thinks he owns the place!"

"So he didn't tell you?" Tommy asked, picking up the story.

"He never tells me anything!" Rusty boomed. "But that's not your fault," he added. "I see you've got your caps and everything. You guys know what to do?"

"Service with a smile," Brian said with a grin.

"Good," Rusty nodded. "If you have any questions, just ask me or another bellman."

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"We'll do that, Mr. Rodgers," Tommy said. "Thanks."

"Just doing my job," he said. "Now look sharp!" He turned and headed back to the check-in counter.

Tommy blew out a sigh. *Another* close call. It was a good thing they were only doing this for one day.

"So far, so good," Brian said. He rubbed his hands together. "Now it's time to make some cash!"

o o o

"It was totally weird," Lindsay said in the backseat of a taxi on the way to Ghirardelli Square. "I just saw two boys in the lobby who looked like Tommy and Brian. Only they were dressed as bellboys."

"It couldn't have been them," Megan said. "They're both sick in bed."

Lindsay nodded. "I know. But they looked exactly like them. And I mean *exactly*."

Rachel giggled. "You must really be in love," she said. "You're seeing Tommy everywhere!"

When the taxi pulled up at the square, a small crowd had already gathered. The gang piled out of the car and looked around. Bobby used his binoculars to check out the competition. He saw three guys, about his age, wearing football jerseys. *Jocks*, he thought. *They're no competition*. He moved the binoculars and scanned more of the crowd. Some old people. Some



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young people. People of all shapes and sizes.

But he didn't see the ladies from the coffee shop. *Must've dropped out*, he figured.

"Is this really the chocolate factory?" Rachel asked. She looked up at the renovated brick building. "It looks like a shopping center."

"It is," Megan said. "My guidebook said that they moved the factory to the East Bay in the 1960s. Before that, it drew big crowds. And there's still a minifactory in the Ghirardelli store."

Just then a man in a Ghirardelli jacket came through the door. He cleared his throat and spoke into a microphone. "I'd like a member from each team to come up and get the first clue," he said. "But please don't read them until I give the word."

"I'll do it!" Screech declared. He hurried forward and appeared at Bobby's side a minute later. He handed him the clue.

"This contest has officially begun!" the man said.

"What does it say?" Rachel shouted above the excited chatter. They all leaned over Bobby's shoulder to see.

"Come on, read it!" Megan added.

"Hold your horses," Bobby said as he unfolded the piece of paper.

Bobby leaned in close to the paper and squinted. "Al Capone's temporary home," he read aloud.

Screech tapped his chin thoughtfully.

## It's the Thought That Counts

Rachel wrinkled her forehead.

"Hmm," Lindsay said. "Maybe it's a fancy Victorian on Nob Hill."

"But it says 'temporary,'" Bobby pointed out.

"An old hotel?" Lindsay suggested.

Everyone looked at each other in silence. "Hey, do you suppose it's—" Megan began.

"Alcatraz!" Screech finished triumphantly.

"The prison?" Lindsay asked.

Megan nodded. "It used to be a prison, but they closed it down in the sixties. It's just a museum now. But I think Al Capone was imprisoned there in the thirties," she added.

"Right," Screech agreed. The crowd began to scatter. "And the ferry that will take us there is just a few short blocks away. Come on! We have to move fast!"

The gang quickly walked to Fisherman's Wharf to catch the ferry. But when they got to the pier, the boat's engines were already running. The crew was untying its lines. It was about to leave!

"Wait for us!" Bobby shouted, sprinting ahead.

The rest of the gang ran after him.

"Hurry up, Rachel!" Lindsay called over her shoulder. Rachel was wearing a pair of pumps that weren't exactly made for running.

Bobby practically flung himself onto the waiting ferry. He pleaded with the crew to wait for his



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friends. "Just a few more seconds," he said.

Rachel was the last to reach the ferry, and Bobby stuck out his arms and lifted her on.

"We made it!" he exclaimed.

After catching their breath, the gang climbed to the top deck and looked out over the bay.

Bobby peered through his binoculars back at the land. "Looks like we left the competition behind!" he said happily.

"This is so cool," Rachel said as the boat moved forward. It was a brisk, clear day, and not a speck of fog was on the water.

"I think that's Sausalito," Megan said, pointing northward off the left side of the boat.

"It is," Screech confirmed. "It's a really cute town."

"Wow," Rachel said, impressed. "You've been everywhere."

Bobby put an arm around Screech's skinny shoulder. "And he knows how to *get* everywhere," he said proudly.

"I can't wait to see the prison," Lindsay said. "I've heard it's really spooky and neat."

"Remember, girls," Screech said, "we're on a mission. There won't be any time to lollygag around."

Megan rolled her eyes. Now Bobby had Screech all flipped out about the contest. "Winning isn't everything, you guys," she said. She was happy to go

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along and help out, but that didn't mean she was going to miss out on the sights.

"They're like a couple of army generals," Rachel said with a giggle.

The boat's engines rumbled as the ferry chugged along.

"Let's find a place to sit," Lindsay suggested. The gang moved away from the railing and found a long bench in the center of the top deck. When everyone had a seat, Screech and Bobby started rattling off names for the special-run chocolate bar.

"Nut-o-licious."

"Choc-o-nut."

"Nut now."

"Nut-thing."

"Nutty-nutty bang bang!"

"Talk about nuts," Megan said, sliding down on the bench. "These guys take the cake."

Bobby started to protest. But before he had a chance, the sound of laughter caught his attention. Turning around, he saw the three teenage boys with football jerseys sitting on a bench behind them.

The competition was hot on their trail!



chapter

1

**A**t the hotel, Brian and Tommy were busily delivering luggage to guests' rooms and running various errands. "You'll enjoy your stay here at the Cartwright," Brian told a group of four elderly ladies. He pushed a cart piled with their old-fashioned suitcases down the hall on the seventh floor.

"Oh, I'm sure we will," one of the women said with a gracious smile. She had on a yellow dress and matching shoes. "My friends and I have been coming here every year for twenty years."

"Really?" Brian asked. "That's terrific."

"We come to see the big city," another woman said.

"Where do you come from?" Brian asked as he pushed the cart around a corner.

It's the Thought That Counts

"Marysville," she answered. "It's a tiny town a little bit north of here."

Just then Brian heard the sound of voices in the hall. "It won't happen again, Mr. Snuffington," a woman's voice said. Brian looked up and saw a young maid standing in the hall talking to a tall, thin man.

*Snuffington!* Brian thought. He was just the person Brian needed to steer clear of.

"Is something the matter?" one of the old ladies asked. She peered at Brian over the tops of her bifocals.

"Uh, no," he said distractedly. "Everything is fine." For the first time that day he was glad that his cap was too big. He pulled it down over his face and continued pushing the cart down the hall behind the ladies.

"... our guests are our number-one concern," Mr. Snuffington was telling the maid.

Brian watched the room numbers as he moved down the hall. *Just don't let their rooms be right where Snuffington is standing*, he prayed silently.

But then his worst nightmare happened. "Mr. Snuffington!" one of the ladies called cheerfully. "How are you?"

Mr. Snuffington turned, a scowl on his face. But when he saw the ladies, he smiled. "Well, hello, ladies," he greeted. He turned back to the maid. "You may go, Charlotte," he said curtly, and the maid scurried down the hall.



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"Back for our annual visit, are we?" Mr. Snuffington asked, shaking the ladies' hands.

"Yes, yes," another woman answered. "We're looking forward to another lovely stay in your hotel."

Mr. Snuffington beamed. "And are you being well taken care of?" he asked, glancing meaningfully at Brian. A look of confusion crossed Mr. Snuffington's face, as if he didn't know who Brian was. Luckily, he didn't say anything.

*Probably doesn't want to make a scene in front of his precious guests,* Brian thought. But that was fine with him.

"Of course," one of the women answered. "We always receive the very best treatment when we're at the Cartwright."

Mr. Snuffington nodded. Then he excused himself, saying he had to get back to the lobby. A moment later he disappeared down the hall.

Brian blew out a sigh as he pushed the cart the few more yards to the ladies' room. Now it was just a matter of time before Mr. Snuffington and Rusty Rodgers put two and two together.

*By then we'll be long gone,* Brian mused. *With one hundred dollars!*

## It's the Thought That Counts

o o o

On the sixth floor, Tommy plopped down in a seat by the elevator. He'd been toting around people's luggage for almost two hours and was already exhausted.

*Being a bellboy sure is a lot more tiring than being a mechanic,* he thought. *And it doesn't pay as well, either.* He fished in his pocket and pulled out the money he'd earned so far.

Counting it up, he sighed. Twenty-two dollars. If he wanted to get those earrings for Lindsay, he'd really have to hustle. An image of her flashed in his mind. She was the greatest girlfriend ever! He couldn't bear to let her down. Especially after telling her they couldn't spend the day together. *But this is for her,* he reminded himself. *And she's going to love those earrings.*

"Psssst. Hey, you!"

Tommy was pulled away from his thoughts by the sound of someone calling him. Startled, he looked up. A balding, middle-aged man was peering down at him.

"Where's the gift shop?" he asked.

"Um, I'm afraid we don't have one, sir," Tommy said.

The man's eyes widened. "No gift shop?" he bel-  
lowed.



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Tommy got to his feet. "Is there a problem, sir?" he asked politely.

The man nodded rapidly. "Yes, there's a terrible problem!" he said. He looked over his shoulder, as if someone were following him. "It's my anniversary, and I completely forgot," he confessed. "My wife is going to kill me!"

Tommy let out a low whistle. "I can relate, man," he said. "I've been going through a bit of that myself."

"Then you understand," the man said. He pulled a wad of bills out of his pocket and thrust them at Tommy. "Do me a favor. Run down to the florist and buy me two dozen white roses," he said. "The ones with the long stems—the best!"

Just then a nearby door opened and a middle-aged woman with curlers stuck her head into the hall. "Harry, what are you doing?" she asked.

"Nothing, dumpling," Harry replied. Then he dropped his voice to a whisper. "Write a note and stick it with the flowers," he said. "Something sweet and a little corny. She loves that stuff."

Tommy nodded. "You can count on me, sir," he said.

"Good. You can keep the change," the man said. "Now hurry!"

As the man walked away, Tommy counted the bills in his hand.

## It's the Thought That Counts

*Fifty dollars!* he thought. *If I can get a good price on the flowers, I'll make a huge tip!*

o o o

At Alcatraz, the rest of the gang was searching for Al Capone's cell. The ex-prison was crowded, and they were having a hard time finding their way.

"Watch it," Rachel grumbled when a man jabbed her in the stomach with his elbow.

"Do you see them?" Screech asked Bobby. He was peering through the binoculars in search of the boys with the football jerseys. But it was so crowded that everything was a big blur. "Those people look suspicious," Screech said. He pointed to a young family. "I'll bet that little boy would do anything for a case of chocolate bars."

"Good thinking, Sherlock," Bobby said. He held up his camera and snapped their picture. "Just in case," he said, winking at Screech.

"Hey, you guys! Do you want to find Al Capone's cell or not?" Lindsay asked as a little boy rushed past her.

"I think it's in this block of cells," Megan added, pointing to her map.

The gang followed Megan's lead down a staircase. There weren't very many people down there, and their footsteps echoed in the hollow stone hallway.



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"There it is!" Rachel shouted. She pointed to a cell at the end of the hall.

"Shhhh!" Bobby said. "Do you want everyone in the contest to hear you?"

"Sorry," Rachel replied sheepishly.

The gang filed into the cell and immediately spotted a small box on the floor. It was filled with papers. Taped to the front was an old photograph of Al Capone, and a note that said: ONE DOWN, THREE TO GO! PLEASE TAKE ONE.

"All right," Bobby exclaimed. "It's our next clue."

"And it looks like we're the first ones here," Lindsay added excitedly.

Screech snatched a piece of paper and straightened up.

"Read it!" Megan prodded.

Screech looked around warily. "Not here," he said. "Come on."

He led the gang out of the cell and back down the hall.

"Screech, where are you taking us!" Megan wanted to know.

"To a safe, secret place," Screech replied mysteriously.

Screech led everyone into an empty cell. "I think we're clear here," he said, looking around. He began to unfold the note.

## It's the Thought That Counts

"Look!" Lindsay whispered, pointing into the hall. "It's the guys from the ferry!"

Everyone craned their necks to get a look as the three guys walked by.

"Hey, the blond one is kinda cute!" Rachel said. She pointed to the boy who had green eyes and tousled golden hair.

"He's the enemy!" Bobby hissed.

Screech stuffed the piece of paper into his mouth as the boy walked up to the cell door.

"What a cool place," he said, looking around.

Rachel blushed and let out a giggle. But Megan stepped forward.

"It probably wasn't cool if you were an inmate," she said. "Did you know they had roll call five times a day?"

"Really?" the boy said. He smiled and stuck his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

Just then Megan felt someone poke her in the back. She turned around, and Bobby scowled at her. He mouthed the word "enemy."

Megan poked him back. "Pipe down," she whispered. "We're doing you a favor . . . I've got a plan to help you win!"



chapter

8

**A**t the hotel, Brian was helping a woman and her Afghan dog get settled into their room. "There you go, Ms. Cummings," he said. He set two matching designer suitcases down on the plush blue carpet.

"Fine," the woman replied. Her salt-and-pepper hair was wrapped into a neat bun, and she wore a stylish dark green suit. She carried a matching handbag.

Ms. Cummings handed Brian the dog's leash, and the dog sat down at his feet and peered up at him.

Brian waited for the woman to open the purse and give him his tip.

Only she didn't. Instead, she waved him away. "Well, get going!" she said, eyeing him over the tops of her glasses. "Olive has an appointment

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at Georgie's in fifteen minutes!"

*What is she talking about?* Brian wondered. "Georgie's?" he asked aloud.

"Georgie's Gorgeous Grooming." She glared at him. "Are you new here?"

Suddenly it dawned on him. Ms. Cummings expected him to take her dog to the groomer!

"Oh, you need money, of course," Ms. Cummings said, seeing the confused expression on Brian's face. She opened her purse, pulled out her wallet, and carefully retrieved a fifty-dollar bill.

Brian almost gasped at the sight of the crisp bill. That was Rachel's necklace and plenty left over!

"Tell Georgie that I want a deluxe shampoo, a sealing condition, a dry, and a style—the works!" Ms. Cummings ordered. "This poochie is going to be in a show this afternoon. I want her to look her absolute best." She leaned over and gave Olive a pat on the nose. "We've just got to woo those judges. Don't we, darling?"

"No problem, Ms. Cummings," Brian said, taking the money. "I'll bring her right over to Georgie's and then pick her up when she's done."

"I'm going out to do a bit of shopping," Ms. Cummings said. "If I'm not here when you return, just leave her in the room. She'll be fine until I get back."

Brian nodded and led the dog out. When the door closed behind him, he looked down at Olive and



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grinned. He had fifty dollars in his pocket—and his brain was already scheming about a way to keep it there.

Keeping a lookout for hotel employees, Brian led Olive to his room. She bounced along beside him with a springy step. They had to duck behind an overstuffed chair by the elevators and peek around a few corners, but soon they were safe behind closed doors.

"You sit right here," Brian said, leading the dog to the foot of his bed. Brian watched Olive walk over by the bed and sit down. She was obedient, but sort of pathetic. "You sure are funny-looking," he said. She had a skinny body, spindly legs, and a long snout.

Olive just looked up at him and wagged her tail.

Grabbing a phone book, Brian looked up the number for Georgie's.

"Georgie's Gorgeous Grooming," a woman said on the other end of the line. "We make your pet look like a million dollars. How can I help you?"

"I'd like to cancel an appointment, please," Brian said.

"Fine," the woman replied. "When was it for?"

"Uh," Brian checked his watch. "Right now."

"Right now?" the woman repeated. She sounded a little annoyed. "There's a twenty-dollar service charge for appointments that are canceled without a twenty-four-hour notice."

*Twenty bucks?* Brian thought. That was almost

## It's the Thought That Counts

half of what he had. He thought fast. "Actually, I don't *want* to cancel the appointment," he said, trying to sound mournful. "It's just that Olive passed, passed . . .," he let his voice trail off, acting like he was choked up.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," the woman said quickly. "You must feel awful."

Brian sniffed into the phone. "I do," he said.

"I'm sure Olive is in doggie heaven right now," the woman assured him. She was starting to sound sad, too. "I'll bet she's looking down on us and playing with her doggie friends right this minute."

"I hope you're right," Brian agreed. He twirled the phone cord and looked down at Olive. She was panting at his feet.

"About that cancellation fee," Brian began.

"There will be no charge," the woman said.

*All right!* Brian thought. "But I would hate for you to lose—"

"Really, sir. No charge at all."

At that moment there were voices in the hall, and Olive got to her feet. "Ruff!" she barked.

"What was that?" the woman on the phone asked. She sounded suspicious.

"Uh, that was my cat," Brian replied hastily. "She, uh, thinks she's a dog. Well, thanks for being so understanding."



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"Certainly," the woman said. But she still sounded a little wary.

When Brian hung up the phone, he gave Olive a pat on the back. "What they don't know won't hurt them," he said. "And in less than an hour, I'll be fifty dollars richer—thanks to you!"

o o o

"Do you have any white roses?" Tommy asked the girl behind the counter. He was sweating from running around. This was the third florist he'd been to on Union Square.

"Sure," the girl replied. "Over there in the case." She pointed to a refrigerator case full of cut flowers.

Tommy stepped over to take a look. There were white roses in there, all right. Except that they were all brown around the edges. They looked half dead. *They'd probably be pretty cheap*, he thought. But he couldn't let Harry down. The flowers had to be beautiful.

"Great," Tommy grumbled as he headed back out the door. This task was turning into a waste of time—time he needed to earn money for Lindsay's present!

Outside on the sidewalk, Tommy looked around. So far he'd just been scouring the neighborhood looking for florists. Maybe it was time to ask for a recommendation.

## It's the Thought That Counts

"Excuse me," he said to an approaching man. The man looked at him blankly and kept walking. Tommy shook his head. *People sure are rude*. But there was a friendly looking woman coming from the other direction.

"Excuse me," Tommy tried again. "Can you tell me where there's a florist around here?" he asked.

The woman looked at him as if he had a beak instead of a nose. "Pardon me?" she asked.

"Is there a florist nearby?" Tommy repeated.

The woman stepped closer and waved a hand in front of Tommy's face.

*What the heck is she doing?* Tommy wondered. Then he remembered that he was already standing in front of a florist. The woman probably thought he was blind!

"I mean, *another* florist," he clarified. "I'm looking for long-stemmed white roses, and this place doesn't have any."

The woman laughed. "Sure," she said. She gave Tommy directions.

A few minutes later he arrived at a fourth florist and found more white roses than he could ever need.

"I'd like two dozen white roses, please," he told the man behind the counter.

"No problem," the man said. He opened the refrigerator case and began pulling out the flowers.



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"And a card, too."

"They're on the counter," the man said. "By the register."

Tommy walked over to the register and checked out the cards. Most of them were pretty tacky, but he figured that Harry's wife would probably be so gaga over the roses that she wouldn't notice too much. He picked up a pen and looked down at the blank card.

*Something kind of corny*, he thought, remembering what Harry had told him. Then he wrote down the first thing that came to mind:

*EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE OLD AND GRAY,  
I LOVE YOU MORE EVERY DAY.*

*Writing poetry sure is easy when it's for somebody else's girl*, he thought.

By the time Tommy had put the card in an envelope, the florist had put together a bouquet and wrapped it in a long, rectangular box. "That'll be thirty-two dollars and forty-six cents," he said, setting the box down on the counter next to the envelope.

*Which leaves over sixteen dollars for me!* Tommy thought excitedly. Maybe this little task was worth it after all.

Tommy pulled the money out of his pocket, along with Lindsay's card. But some of the coins clattered to the floor. When Tommy bent down to pick them

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up, the clerk took the money, made change, and slipped the note on the counter into the box.

When Tommy got back to the hotel, he went straight to Harry's room and knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice called.

"Special delivery," Tommy said.

A second later, a woman opened the door. "Happy anniversary, ma'am," Tommy said with a smile.

The woman beamed and took the box from Tommy. "For me?" she said coyly. "Thank you." She handed Tommy a ten-dollar tip, then closed the door.

*All right*, Tommy thought. *Sixteen dollars in change and a ten-dollar tip*. That wasn't bad at all.

"Harry," he heard Ethel squeal. "You're such a little devil."

Tommy looked back at the door. Little devil? He'd thought the poem was kind of corny and sweet. *Oh, well. Whatever*, he thought with a shrug. Stuffing the ten dollars into his pocket, he felt the envelope inside—Lindsay's card.

*I'd better deliver this before I forget*, he told himself. He pulled it out of his pocket and noticed that it didn't have Lindsay's name on it. He jotted it down with the pen in his front pocket. Then he took the elevator to the fourth floor and slipped the card underneath her door.



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This would cheer Lindsay up for sure and set the tone for their anniversary evening. Tonight was going to be one of their most romantic dates ever. Tommy couldn't wait!

Smiling to himself, he headed down the hall. But when he passed the door to his room, he heard a strange noise. It sounded like . . . a dog barking.

But that was impossible. Wasn't it?

Tommy unlocked the door to his room and stepped inside. Sure enough, standing right there in front of him, was a dog.

A long, skinny, fluffy, white dog.

"What the heck are you doing here?" he asked it.

"Ruff!" the dog replied.

Tommy looked around the room. What was going on?

Just then Brian came out of the bathroom. "Tommy!" he said. "I was just going to look for you."

"What's with the dog, Keller?" Tommy asked.

"She's going to make us rich," Brian replied with a grin. He told Tommy his great grooming plan. "All we have to do is get our hands on some smelly shampoo and a few styling tools, and we'll be in business."

"Are you nuts?" Tommy exclaimed, throwing his hands up in the air. "We don't know anything about dog grooming. And this isn't some mutt. This is a prize-winning Afghan! My aunt Trudy had one of

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these dogs, and it cost a guzillion dollars!"

"Afghan, shmafghan," Brian said. "A dog is a dog. And it's not like we'll be cutting her hair or anything. She just needs a shampoo. A little conditioner. A style. And a dry. How hard can it be?"

Tommy looked down at Olive. "How much money did you say we're going to make?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Fifty buckaroos," Brian replied.

Tommy let out a low whistle. "If we split it in half, that'll almost give me what I need," he said. "Let's go for it!"



chapter

9

**T**he rest of the gang was hot on the trail of the next clue: A TOWERING TRIBUTE TO THE FIREMEN OF SAN FRANCISCO.

"It's Coit Tower," Megan said. "It was built by a really cool woman named Lillie Hitchcock Coit. She wore pants and smoked cigars at the turn of the century."

Rachel's mouth dropped open in horror. "Smoking is disgusting," she said. "Not cool."

"I know that," Megan replied as the gang headed to the ferry. "The point was that she did what she wanted to do, no matter what society said."

By now, the sun was high in the sky. The bay water glistened, and the buildings of San Francisco stood out against the blue sky.

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On board, Megan explained her plan to the boys.

"We weren't just being friendly with those boys," she said. "We were setting the stage! Now when we see them again at Coit Tower, it'll be easy to distract them even more. Then you guys can get a good lead in the contest."

"We get to flirt with them some more?" Rachel asked with a giggle.

Megan nodded.

"I feel a little guilty," Lindsay said. "I mean, it's my anniversary!"

"Oh, Linds," Rachel said. "It's not for real. It's for fun!"

"It's for the contest. For Bobby and Screech," Megan corrected.

"Okay. I'll do it," Lindsay agreed.

When the ferry docked at the pier, everyone scrambled off the boat.

"Look at those two old ladies," Lindsay said. "Aren't they sweet?"

"Where?" Bobby and Screech chorused, looking around in a panic. Bobby pulled his minibinoculars out of his pocket.

"Right in front of you, silly," Lindsay pointed to two old ladies wearing flowered hats and carrying parasols.

Screech and Bobby stopped short. It was them! The ladies from the coffee shop!



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"I love their hats," Rachel said. "They match their outfits perfectly!"

Screech cleared his throat. "For your information, those ladies are the enemy!"

"They're just a couple of sweet old ladies," Lindsay objected.

"Who happen to be competing in the contest," Bobby added. "Which definitely puts them on the enemy list."

The girls exchanged glances. Screech and Bobby had lost their marbles over this contest.

"Come on," Megan said sarcastically. "Let's get going before the *enemy* overtakes us."

Following Bobby's map, the gang began the walk up the steep, winding hill that led to Coit Tower.

"Whew," Lindsay said after a block. "I'm tired already."

"Can't we take a taxi?" Rachel asked.

"It's not that far," Megan said. "We can do it."

A few paces ahead of them, Screech and Bobby trudged onward.

"I'll bet it takes the ladies an hour to get up here," Bobby panted. But when he looked over his shoulder, he saw them marching briskly along on the other side of the street. They were keeping up a steady pace!

"I can't believe it," Bobby moaned. "Let's go!"

Screech turned and caught sight of the ladies, too. And he smiled in spite of himself. Marie really

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did look like Grandma Rosie. And Grandma Rosie had the same determination.

Bobby hurried ahead, and Screech followed. But they were only able to gain a slight lead on Marie and Serina. When they got up to the tower, the ladies weren't far behind.

"Into the elevator. Hurry!" Screech said. He and Bobby dashed inside, and the doors slid closed.

A moment later, the girls came into the lobby with the old ladies.

"You ladies really dashed up that hill," Lindsay said admiringly. The other girls nodded in agreement as they caught their breath.

Serina grinned. "I walk an hour every day," she said proudly. "And San Francisco is full of hills, so I'm used to it."

"I love your hats," Rachel said. "They really make your outfits."

Marie smiled graciously. "Why, thank you," she said. "This used to be my husband's favorite hat—when he was alive."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Megan said sincerely.

Marie smiled. "It's all right," she said. "He died six years ago."

"We'd love to chat more with you girls," Serina put in. "But we're sort of on a mission today."

Lindsay smiled. *There seems to be a lot of that*



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going around, she thought. "It was nice talking to you," she said.

"It was nice meeting you girls, too," Marie replied warmly.

"We'll just wait here for the guys with the football shirts to come in or go out," Megan said when the ladies were gone. "Then we'll put our plan into action."

"Right," Rachel agreed.

"I wonder how Tommy and Brian are doing," Lindsay said thoughtfully. "Maybe I should give Tommy a call. Have you guys seen a pay phone?"

"I think there's one outside," Megan said.

Lindsay pulled a quarter out of her pocket. "I'll be right back."

"I say we forget about the contest after we distract these boys," Rachel said as Lindsay walked away.

Megan nodded. "I'd like to see some sights without worrying about who the competition is."

"You must mean the *enemy*," Rachel said, and the two girls laughed.

"But since we promised to distract the boys . . ." Megan pulled a map out of her backpack and opened it. "Here's what I think we should do. . . ."

A few minutes later, Lindsay came back.

"How are they?" Megan asked.

"I don't know," Lindsay looked a little confused. "There was no answer."

## It's the Thought That Counts

"Really?" Rachel asked.

"Maybe they're feeling better and went to get something to eat," Megan suggested. "Or maybe they're just sleeping."

Just then the elevator doors opened and the three boys with the football jerseys stepped into the lobby.

Megan cleared her throat. "I wish we knew how to get there," she said. She leaned over Rachel's shoulder and peered at the map.

"I know," Lindsay agreed, picking up the charade. She sighed sadly. "What we need is a tour guide."

"All these tiny lines are so confusing!" Rachel exclaimed. She pretended to drop the map on the floor accidentally.

The boy with the blond hair grabbed the map and handed it to Rachel. Straightening up, he flashed her a smile. "Do you girls need some help?" he asked.

Rachel batted her eyelashes. "Why, yes, we do," she said.

Megan stepped forward. "We're trying to get to Chinatown," she said. "We've heard they have lots of neat shops."

Lindsay twirled a lock of hair around her finger. "Do you think you could give us directions?" she asked.

"Sure," the dark-haired boy said. "You can walk there from here. The best thing to do is



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head down Kearny Street."

"Leerny?" Megan repeated. She said the name wrong on purpose. "I don't see that on the map."

"Kearny," the third boy said. He had curly hair and a crooked smile. "With a K. It's right here." He pointed to the map.

"I don't see it," Rachel said, leaning down to get a closer look.

"Forget Kearny," the blond boy said. He stepped closer to Rachel. "It's faster if you take Grant."

"Oh," Rachel said faintly. "Grant. Could you show us where that street is?"

The blond boy pointed to the map.

"I think we could find that," Megan said.

"It's easy," said the second boy. "You just head out the door and go west until you hit Grant."

"Right," Rachel said. Then she put her finger up to her chin. "Which way is west again?"

"That way," two of the boys said at once. Only they pointed in different directions!

"I think we're even confusing them!" Megan whispered to Lindsay. Lindsay bit her lower lip so she wouldn't laugh out loud. The boys were beginning to argue!

"You idiot," the blond boy said. "West is that way!"

"No, it isn't!" said the other. "You're turned around because we're inside!"

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Just then the elevator doors opened, and Screech and Bobby came into the lobby. The three boys didn't even notice them as they headed for the door.

"Well, I still think Kearny is the best way to go," the dark-haired boy was saying in a loud voice.

"Grant!" said the blond one.

Behind the boys' backs, Screech gave Megan a thumbs-up sign.

Megan grinned. Their plan was working! They'd let them argue for a few more minutes. Then they'd miraculously learn how to read a map. And after that, the girls would have the rest of the afternoon to themselves!

o o o

Back at the hotel, Tommy and Brian were sneaking into the girls' room. "It's a good thing Lindsay forgot to ask for her key back," Brian said as Tommy unlocked the door. "Otherwise we'd have to *buy* all this fancy shampoo and stuff."

Tommy shook his head. Even though Lindsay was his girlfriend and Megan and Rachel were his friends, he *still* didn't feel good about sneaking into their room. *It's for a good cause*, he told himself as he stepped inside.

The guys made a beeline for the bathroom. There, on the counter, was a neat row of several kinds of shampoo, conditioner, mousse, and gel.



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"Thank you, Rachel," Brian said as he picked up a bottle of seafoam conditioning shampoo. "Guaranteed to give you oceans of body," he read. He turned to Tommy. "This ought to be perfect."

Brian reached for several other bottles of hair goo. Tommy chose a special round brush, a hair dryer, and some curlers. Their arms full of styling items, the boys headed back to their room.

Brian filled the tub with warm water, and they led Olive into the bathroom.

"Okay, Olive," Brian said, "jump in!"

Olive sat down on the bathroom rug and started to pant.

"The tub," Brian repeated. Didn't the dog understand English?

Olive yawned.

"Looks like we'll have to lift her in," Brian finally said. Brian grabbed ahold of the dog under her front legs. Tommy lifted her behind. But when they got Olive over the water, she started wriggling like mad.

"Whatever you do, don't let go!" Brian exclaimed.

But Olive dug a claw into Tommy's hand. Howling in pain, he let go. She hit the water, sending a giant wave over the edge of the tub and onto the bathroom floor.

Brian gave Tommy a dirty look. His shirt was soaked.

## It's the Thought That Counts

"I couldn't help it," Tommy said. "She jabbed her claw right into my hand!" He showed Brian the mark on his palm.

Brian's scowl deepened. "Just wash the dog," he said.

But that was easier said than done.

Olive kept lying down and batting her front paws on the tub—as if she were doing the doggy paddle! Scratch, scratch, scratch. Her nails clawed at the tile.

"Lift her up!" Brian said. His hands were covered with shampoo.

"I'm trying," Tommy said. He hauled Olive to her feet and held her in a standing position. "I thought dogs liked baths," he panted as Olive tried to wriggle away from him.

"Me, too," Brian said. He was using a cup to rinse the shampoo from Olive's fur. His whole shirt was covered with wet, soapy dog hair.

"Okay," he said a few minutes later. "I think we're ready for the conditioner."

"Can't we skip the conditioner?" Tommy asked. "My arms are killing me."

Brian considered this for a moment. Ms. Cummings had definitely said she wanted a condition. But he had used a conditioning shampoo, and they had plenty of gel and mousse for smooth styling.

"Okay, we'll skip it," he agreed.



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"Thank goodness," Tommy said. He let go of Olive and leaned back against the bathroom wall.

As soon as Olive realized she was no longer a prisoner, she leaped out of the tub and darted across the bathroom floor.

"Close the door!" Brian said, leaping to his feet.

But it was too late. Olive was already through the door and into the bedroom. She jumped onto Tommy's bed and shook, spraying water everywhere, including onto Tommy's favorite shirt—the one he'd planned to wear that night.

"My shirt!" Tommy cried, dashing into the room and scooping it off the bed. Olive leaped across to Brian's bed and shook again.

Brian shook his head. The bedspreads had puddles of water on them. Patches of unrinsed suds sat on the floor. Practically the whole room was doused with water.

Brian tackled the dog and pulled her off the bed. Soaked to the skin, he wrestled with Olive, who was panting right in his face.

*Ugh. Dog breath. Is this worth it?* he wondered. But he didn't really have time to think about it. Olive wriggled out of his arms and jumped back onto his bed. "Get some towels," he cried. "Fast!"

## chapter

# 10

"That was great," Megan said. She followed Lindsay and Rachel into the hotel lobby.

"No kidding," Lindsay agreed. "Boys are so gullible."

"They sure are," Rachel said. "Could you believe the way they started arguing? It was like they all wanted to rescue us."

The three girls giggled as they got into the elevator.

"Thanks for coming back here with me," Lindsay said. "I just want to check on the boys, and then we can decide what to do for the rest of the afternoon." She pressed the button for their floor.

A few minutes later, Rachel and Megan were heading toward their room while Lindsay knocked



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on the boys' door. *Is that the sound of a hair dryer?* she wondered as she waited for someone to answer. Tommy wasn't a blow-drying type of guy, that was for sure. And she didn't think Brian was, either.

Suddenly the noise stopped. A moment later, the door cracked open. Brian's face squinted into the opening.

"Uh, hi, Lindsay," he said. He sounded a little nervous.

Lindsay sniffed the air. A perfumy smell drifted past her nose. "What are you guys doing?" she asked.

"Doing?" Brian repeated. "Nothing, why?" he added innocently.

"I thought I heard a hair dryer," Lindsay said.

"A hair dryer?" Brian laughed, as if that were a ridiculous idea. "No hair dryer in here," he said. "Actually, we're still feeling a little under the weather."

"Really," Lindsay said, raising an eyebrow. She was beginning to get the feeling that something strange was going on. "Can I talk to Tommy?" she asked.

"He's in the bathroom," Brian said quickly. "But, uh, you're still on for your dinner tonight. See you later."

Before Lindsay could say another word, the door closed in her face.

*What was that all about?* she wondered. She raised her hand to knock again, then changed her

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mind. As she walked back to her room, she reached into her pocket for her key. Then she remembered that she didn't have it—Tommy did.

She knocked on the door to the girls' room, and Megan opened it. She didn't look happy.

"What's wrong?" Lindsay asked when she saw her friend's face.

"Somebody's been in our room," Megan said.

"And they stole my toiletries!" Rachel added in a wail. "Including my curlers and my hair dryer!"

"Hair dryer?" Lindsay asked, her expression a thoughtful frown. She was sure she'd heard a hair dryer in the boys' room just now. And she'd given Tommy her key the night before. . . .

"The boys have your stuff," she told Rachel. "And a lot of explaining to do!"

o o o

"Why do you suppose they're back from the contest so early?" Brian asked as he rubbed a generous amount of superhold styling gel over Olive's fur.

The dog was sitting on the vanity counter outside the bathroom. Her fur was still soaked, and she looked like a giant wet rat.

Tommy shrugged. "All I know is, you shouldn't have lied about the hair dryer. Rachel keeps track of her bathroom stuff. She's going to notice that things



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are missing, and we'll be in deep trouble."

"Quit worrying," Brian said. "All we have to do is finish up with Olive, and that fifty dollars will officially be ours." He turned the hair dryer back on and began to scrunch Olive's hair as he moved it around. But instead of lying flat, the fur was totally frizzing up!

Tommy took one look at the dog and put his head in his hands. "Why did I let you talk me into this?" he asked mournfully.

"Me?" Brian objected. "You're the one who said we should skip the conditioner. Maybe if we'd used it, Olive wouldn't have out-of-control hair!"

"I just suggested it," Tommy replied hotly. "You made the final decision."

Brian turned the hair dryer off and sighed. "Arguing isn't going to help," he said.

Tommy nodded. "We've got to come up with a way to get rid of these frizzles. Otherwise, the girls will be the least of our worries."

Brian tapped his chin thoughtfully. "Maybe we should use curlers," he said. "Girls always use them for special occasions."

Tommy looked doubtful. "I don't know," he said.

Brian waved him off. "Curls will be perfect," he said confidently. He plugged in Rachel's hot curlers. "You'll see."

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A few minutes later, the boys began to roll Olive's hair into tight curls.

"How are you supposed to make the hair go all the way around?" Tommy asked. Olive's hair was all different lengths. Half of the hair Tommy had rolled was sticking out at weird angles.

"Smooth some gel or mousse onto it," Brian replied. He tossed a tube of gel to Tommy and picked up another curler. Rolling carefully, he wound it tightly against Olive's back.

It took twenty minutes for the boys to get most of Olive's hair into curlers. Olive sat patiently on the counter the whole time. She seemed to love the attention. Some of her fur was still sticking out, and a few of the curlers were crooked. But for the most part it looked pretty good.

Finally, Brian took some hair spray and gave her coat a good once-over. "Just to be sure the curl holds," he said, remembering a commercial he'd heard for hair spray. He picked up the hair dryer again. When the curls were dry, the boys began to unroll them.

Tommy gave the dog a doubtful look. "I don't think curls are what the owner had in mind," he said. He tossed a curler onto the counter.

"Are you kidding?" Brian said. "Curls are the rage. She's going to be thrilled."



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But when all the curlers were out, Tommy started to laugh. "Man, oh, man," he said. "She looks totally stupid!" Tight, stiff-looking curls covered the dog's body. It reminded him of those old-fashioned powdered wigs.

"It can't look that bad," Brian objected. He stepped back a few feet. But when he looked at the dog, his eyes widened in shock.

Olive looked like a canine Shirley Temple!

## chapter



"Do you see any dwarfs?" Screech asked, looking around. He and Bobby stood in Golden Gate Park working on their latest clue: the biggest dwarf under the golden gate. Since the park was right near the bridge, they figured it was the best place to start their search. The only problem was, they didn't know what to look for once they got there.

"No dwarfs," Bobby replied. He was peering through his binoculars. "Just a lot of ducks, horses, and buffalo."

"Buffalo?" Screech asked excitedly. "As in the great herding animals that used to roam the plains?"

Bobby pulled the binoculars away from his face. "That's what I said, Fred," he replied. "They're right



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over there." He pointed to a paddock not too far away.

"Wow," Screech said. "It's like we're home on the range! They've got *everything* in this park."

"Everything except dwarfs," Bobby lamented. He heaved a giant sigh. "I'm beginning to wish we'd told the girls to meet up with us again. We need Megan's brain power."

Just then Bobby grabbed Screech's arm and squeezed—hard.

"Ouch!" Screech said. "That hurts!"

"I don't believe it!" Bobby exclaimed.

"Believe it," Screech replied. He rubbed his arm.

"I'll probably have a big bruise tomorrow."

"Sorry, Screech," Bobby said. "But that's not what I meant. Look!"

Screech followed Bobby's gaze across the grassy area, and his jaw dropped. It was Marie and Serina, and they were dashing ahead toward the Japanese Tea Garden.

"Those little dwarfs are so cute!" Marie exclaimed. "Imagine having a tiny thing like that growing in your very own living room."

"A dwarf growing in your living room?" Bobby asked, confused. "I thought dwarfs were permanently small. I thought they didn't grow. I mean, isn't that what makes them dwarfs?" he babbled to himself.

As Screech watched the old ladies, he seemed to

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be deep in thought. "Growing dwarfs," he murmured. A moment later, his eyes focused on a sign in the distance: JAPANESE TEA GARDEN. *Japanese dwarfs?* "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "The dwarf must be a bonsai!"

Bobby shook his head. "Could you repeat that in English, please?"

"Bonsai is the Japanese art of growing dwarf trees," Screech explained gleefully. "They're real trees, except they grow in pots and are kept very small. And according to my computerized travel guide, they have a big collection of them at the Japanese Tea Garden!"

Bobby put a hand around Screech's shoulders. "Screech, you are the greatest, most awesome, most incredible scavenger hunter that ever was."

Screech grinned. "Why, thank you," he said.

The two boys hurried across the park to the garden. Full of beautifully shaped hedges, Oriental statues, walkways, and benches, it was a peaceful place. But the neatest thing about the garden was the bonsai collection.

"How do they grow like that?" Bobby asked, his eyes wide. The tiny trees amazed him. They were like miniature models of normal trees. But they were alive. And some were only five inches tall!

"It's a special technique," Screech said. "But I don't know exactly how it's done." He tapped his



chin. "How're we supposed to find the biggest one?"

Bobby grinned. "With my handy-dandy measuring tape, of course," he said. He pulled the tape out of his pocket. "But I'll bet we can narrow it down by looking."

The team made their way through the garden, carefully eyeing the miniature trees. Bobby measured a couple of the bigger ones, and Screech typed the numbers into his computerized organizer.

Near the end of the route, they came across a big tree. "I'll bet this is it!" Bobby said excitedly. He held up his tape measure. But Screech had already found a little basket of folded papers underneath the potted plant. He snatched one up and unfolded it carefully.

"What does it say?" Bobby asked. He peered over Screech's shoulder.

They were so busy reading the note that they didn't notice the two old ladies coming their way.

"WHERE ONE SEES SAN FRANCISCAN CARS OPERATE," Bobby said. "I don't get it. Cars operate all over San Francisco."

"True," Screech said. He tapped his foot thoughtfully. "But San Franciscan cars . . ." he muttered. "What does it mean?"

The two boys moved away from the bonsai as they pondered the clue.

"Are there any automobile factories around here?" Bobby wondered aloud.

"Maybe it's some sort of car ride at a fair or something," Screech put in. But a second later he snapped his fingers. "Cable cars! The streetcars that made San Francisco famous!" he exclaimed.

"Shhhh, not so loud," Bobby said. But he was too excited about figuring out the clue to be angry. "Let's go!"

The boys turned to leave the park. But they only went a few steps before a voice stopped them. "Excuse me," it called out behind them.

The boys turned around and found themselves facing Marie and Serina. Surprised and a little horrified, Bobby jumped back.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," Marie said. "We didn't mean to startle you."

"You didn't?" Bobby narrowed his eyes, giving the women a suspicious look.

"Of course not," Serina put in. "We were just wondering if one of you boys dropped this." She held up Bobby's wallet.

"My wallet!" Bobby exclaimed. He took it from her. "Where was it?"

"Lying on the path," Marie said. "Right over there."

"It must have fallen when I got out my tape measure," Bobby guessed. "Thanks. I'd be totally lost without it."



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Marie smiled. "Well, now we've returned the favor," she said. "For the compact, I mean."

"Of course," Screech said. Marie was really a sweet old lady. It was too bad she was competing in the contest.

"Well, we've got to be going," Serina said. "I hope we get the chance to see you boys again."

Arm in arm, the ladies headed down the pathway, out of the park.

"Come on," Bobby said. "We've got to beat them to where? . . ."

"My best guess is the Cable Car Museum," Screech offered.

"You're a genius, Screech," Bobby said. He was psyched! But as he and Screech left the park, he felt a tiny bit guilty about the old ladies. All day he'd been calling them the enemy. But they'd just done him a huge favor. How would he have gotten to the Cable Car Museum without any money? *All is fair in love and war*, he thought. And a contest was war.

Wasn't it?

o o o

Back at the hotel, Brian and Tommy were trying to decide what to do with their Shirley Temple look-alike.

"We'll just sneak her back into Ms. Cummings's

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room," Brian said calmly. "She's gone out to do some shopping."

"That isn't exactly going to solve the problem," Tommy said pointedly.

"What problem?" Brian asked. "She looks great." He wasn't sure that was true, but he didn't think she looked terrible. Just original.

Tommy grimaced as he followed Brian out of the room and down the hall. Every hotel guest they passed stared at them. Some people burst into laughter. Others whispered. And still others spoke right out loud.

"Look at that dog!" shrieked a little girl.

"I'll bet it's from the circus!" added her older brother.

Tommy was glad when they reached Ms. Cummings's room. And luck was on their side, because the door was open.

"The maid must be in there," Brian whispered.

Tommy nodded, and Brian unhooked Olive from the leash. Shoving her inside, he tossed the leash onto the floor by the door.

A split second later, the boys heard the maid shriek. Then she burst into uproarious laughter.

"I'm telling you, man," Tommy said. "Afghans are not supposed to look like that."



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"There are lots of ways to groom a dog," Brian shot back.

*Even if curls aren't one of them.*

o o o

"Do you think the boys have a girl in there?" Rachel asked. She, Megan, and Lindsay were in their room trying to figure out what was going on.

Lindsay bit her lower lip. She was feeling awful, but was trying to keep a level head. Tommy loved her. At least she *thought* he did. "Something's up for sure," she said sadly. "I just wish I knew what."

"Well, let's find out," Megan said. She stood up and went to the door, and the other girls followed. A second later, Megan pounded on the boys' door.

There was no answer, and all was quiet inside.

Megan got down on her knees and took a whiff under the door. She brushed off her hands. "Smells like wet dog," she declared. "After giving Trouble a zillion baths, I'd know that smell anywhere." Trouble was Megan's almost-grown puppy.

All three girls sniffed the air. "Hey, I smell my shampoo!" Rachel said. Then she stamped her foot in annoyance. "That stuff cost ten bucks!"

Megan got to her feet, and the girls exchanged glances. "So the boys swiped our shampoo so they

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could wash a dog?" Megan said. "It sounds pretty weird, even for Brian and Tommy."

Lindsay let out a huge sigh. "I wish I knew what was going on!" she said. "I mean, it's my anniversary. It's supposed to be *romantic*. Instead I feel like Nancy Drew on a wild-goose chase!"

Megan put her arm around Lindsay's shoulders. "I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for all of this," she said consolingly as the three girls headed back to their room. She wasn't entirely sure that that was true, but she hated to see her friend looking so miserable.

"Right," Rachel agreed. "And you still have your romantic dinner tonight."

But in spite of her friends' words, Lindsay didn't look convinced. She slumped down on the bed and sighed.

"Hey, look at that," Rachel said. She pointed to an envelope on the floor. It was smushed up against the wall behind the door. She picked it up and grinned. "It's for you, Linds," she said, holding the envelope out to her friend.

Lindsay took the envelope. "It's Tommy's handwriting!" she said excitedly.

"I'll bet it's a love note," Rachel said.

Lindsay opened the envelope and opened the card. Tommy was such a great boyfriend! But as her



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eyes skimmed the page, her smile faded.

*EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE OLD AND GRAY,*

*I LOVE YOU MORE EVERY DAY.*

Lindsay's bottom lip began to tremble as she reread the note.

"What's the matter, Lindsay?" Megan asked, her brown eyes wide with concern.

Lindsay handed Megan the note, and she read it aloud.

"Weird!" Rachel exclaimed.

"I wonder what it means," Megan added thoughtfully.

"It means that Tommy thinks our relationship is getting old!" Lindsay blurted as she burst into tears. "And this is the most horrible anniversary I've ever had!"

## chapter

# 12

"That was totally cool," Screech said excitedly. "Especially that room with all that winding machinery."

"No kidding," Bobby agreed. "And can you believe they built cable cars in the 1870's?" He and Bobby had been to the Cable Car Museum and were on their way back to Ghirardelli Square—their final destination for the contest. The boys climbed aboard a cable car that would take them within a block of the square. It was crowded, so they grabbed ahold of the brass pole in the center of the car. A moment later the bell clanged, and the car lurched forward.

"It looks like Megan's plan worked," Bobby murmured. He pulled out his binoculars.

"Yup," Screech agreed. "I haven't seen those guys



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since Coit Tower. And we definitely beat those old ladies to the clue in the museum," he added with a grin.

"They were our only *serious* competition," Bobby said, putting the minibinoculars back into his pocket.

A few minutes later the trolley arrived at the cable-car turnaround. The boys got off and headed toward the big sign for Ghirardelli Square. But when they were just a few steps away from the trolley tracks, something caught Bobby's eye. Something flowery.

"I don't *believe* it," he said.

Screech turned around and groaned. The two old ladies, marching along in their Keds sneakers, were right behind them.

"We've got to get there first!" Bobby exclaimed. "Let's go!"

The two boys dashed down Beach Street and turned onto Larkin. Ahead of them, Ghirardelli Square waited. A big red ribbon was stretched across the door, waiting to be broken by the winner.

Bobby surged ahead. But Marie and Serina were just a few feet behind.

"It's those two nice boys," Serina was saying as she and Marie pounded the pavement. She waved to Screech and Bobby. "It looks like the contest has come down to the four of us!" she called out gleefully.

Bobby scowled. "I can't—"

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He stopped when he saw Serina trip on a curb. Was she all right? Without thinking, he stepped back and reached for her arm. Screech did the same, and the two boys helped the old woman to her feet.

"How clumsy of me," Serina said, straightening her hat. She looked embarrassed.

"Are you all right?" Marie asked.

Serina nodded. "Thank you, boys," she said graciously.

"Sure," Bobby said.

"It was nothing," added Screech.

The four of them stood there for an awkward moment. Then Bobby spoke up.

"I think you ladies were heading for Ghirardelli Square," he said.

"And so were you," Marie added.

"Right," Bobby said. He suddenly felt confused. Just a few minutes ago, he'd wanted to win the contest more than anything. But now it didn't seem so important.

"Well," he said. "Let's go."

Marie and Serina grinned, and the four of them marched toward the square. The two teams were neck and neck.

But a few feet before the finish line, Bobby stopped short.

"What are you doing?" Screech asked. "We're almost there!"



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Bobby gestured to Marie and Serina. They were hurrying along, their faces flushed and rosy. "Winning isn't everything," he said.

Screech smiled and nodded. Then the boys stepped aside, letting the ladies take the lead.

When Marie and Serina crossed the finish line, the crowd whooped and cheered. A newspaper reporter snapped their picture. And a contest official handed them a little trophy and a big box of chocolates.

A local TV station did a quick interview. Then Marie opened the box of chocolates and handed them to the crowd. Screech and Bobby got several bars apiece.

"Do you feel like a loser?" Bobby asked, turning to his teammate.

Screech grinned. "Nope," he said. "In fact, I feel like a pretty big winner."

Bobby grinned. "Me, too," he said. They'd done the right thing.

o o o

Back at the hotel, Brian was greeting a young couple in the lobby. He picked up their suitcases and carried them to the elevators.

"I hope you'll enjoy your stay here at the Cartwright," he said as the doors slid open and they all stepped inside. He pressed the button for the fifth floor.

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"I'm sure we will," the woman replied graciously. She smiled warmly at Brian. "We've been planning a visit to San Francisco for quite a while."

The elevator whooshed up to the fifth floor. But when the doors opened, Brian found himself face to face with . . .

Ms. Cummings! Olive was right next to her—still a bundle of curls. And Ms. Cummings looked furious. When she saw Brian, her eyes widened. "It's you," she exclaimed.

Uh-oh, Brian thought. *I'd better pour on the old Keller charm.* "Ms. Cummings!" he said smoothly. "Nice to see you again."

Ms. Cummings scowled, then opened her mouth to say something.

But Brian didn't give her a chance.

"Whoops!" he exclaimed. He pushed the DOOR CLOSE button. "We haven't finished our tour of the hotel yet," he added hastily to the hotel guests. He pressed the button for the eighth floor, and the elevator car rose again.

"Tour?" the woman asked. "We really don't need to see anything."

"Except our room," her husband put in.

*You can handle this,* Brian assured himself. *Just keep it cool.*

"We like to give all our first-time guests a tour,"



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he fibbed. A second later they arrived at the eighth floor. When the doors slid open, Brian stepped into the hallway. "Notice the lovely plush carpet," he said. "Its deep plum color matches the purple tones in the wallpaper perfectly."

The young couple exchanged a look. "Uh, aren't the carpet and the wallpaper the same on every floor?" the man asked. He looked totally bewildered.

"Why, yes," Brian replied smoothly. "But this floor was recently recarpeted, and I wanted you to get a good look at its excellent pile." *I can't believe I'm actually saying this stuff out loud*, he thought. But it was better than facing Ms. Cummings!

"And now, if you'll step back into the elevator, I'll take you to your room."

The couple let out audible sighs of relief as they all got back into the elevator.

Several minutes later, Brian thanked them for their tip and left the room. "Five bucks," he said aloud as he slipped the bills into his pocket. Added to the rest of the pot, they were just a few dollars short.

*We'll have that money before you know it*, he told himself as he headed down the hall. His step was light and quick, and after a few seconds he began to whistle. But then he turned a corner . . .

And ran right smack into Ms. Cummings and Olive!

## It's the Thought That Counts

"Well, hello, Ms. Cummings," Brian said, flashing her his politician smile. "How lovely to see you again."

"Save it," Ms. Cummings replied bluntly. She gave Brian a steely stare. "I just got off the phone with Georgie's Grooming. I know you canceled Olive's appointment and made this feeble attempt at grooming her yourself."

*Boy*, Brian thought. *She doesn't mince words*. "I just thought that a personal touch . . .," he began.

Ms. Cummings snorted. "Personal touch? Olive could have done a better job herself!" She reached down and patted her dog. "No offense, sweetie," she told the canine.

Brian hung his head. He was busted.

"I'd make you undo this horrible styling job, but there isn't time," Ms. Cummings went on. "Olive has to be at the dog show in less than half an hour. So I'll just have to get my money back and accept your sincerest apologies." She put her hand out with a flourish.

*I can't believe this*, Brian groaned inwardly. But he knew when the game was up. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the fifty-dollar bill.

"I'm really sorry," he said. "It's just that it's my best friend's anniversary and we wanted to get his girlfriend the perfect present. . . ." He let his words trail off. Ms. Cummings didn't look the slightest bit interested.

"I don't have time to listen to your excuses," she



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huffed. "It's showtime!" With that she turned and led Olive away.

When they turned a corner, Brian slumped against the wall. His great plan had backfired, and there was no way they'd get the money now.

What was he going to tell Tommy?

o o o

Where the heck is he? Tommy wondered. He'd been looking for Brian for fifteen minutes, but he was like the invisible friend. He wasn't anywhere!

Tommy checked his watch. It was almost four o'clock, and he had to get over to the boutique to buy Lindsay's earrings.

Maybe he's in the lobby. Tommy took the elevator downstairs and scanned the large room from behind a palm tree near the elevators. Brian was nowhere to be found.

"Hey there, handsome," came a sultry voice from behind him. Tommy whirled around and saw the blond girl from the day before. "I've been looking for you."

Tommy gulped. She was a knockout, all right. But he only had eyes for Lindsay. What did this girl want?

"Y-y-you have?" he stammered. *What's your problem, man?* he scolded himself. *She's just a girl!* "Did you need something?" he added in a smooth tone.

## It's the Thought That Counts

"I guess you could say that," she said, flashing him a smile.

Tommy raised an eyebrow. He'd been going steady with Lindsay for a long time. But he knew when a girl was flirting.

"I wanted to thank you for delivering my things to my room last night," she went on. "I really appreciate it." She pressed another five dollars into his hand—and didn't let go.

Whoa, danger! Tommy thought. Knockout or not, this girl wasn't *his* girl. He was definitely in dangerous territory here.

As if on cue, the elevator door opened, and Lindsay stepped into the lobby. Tommy spotted her right away, and their eyes locked.

Oh my gosh! he panicked. Tommy could feel his face heating up. He let go of the girl's hand. But he didn't drop it in time.

Lindsay had seen everything. She whirled around and got back into the elevator.

"Lindsay!" Tommy shouted. He broke away from the girl and darted toward the elevator. But it was too late. All he got was a glimpse of Lindsay's tear-stained face as the door closed.

Frantic, Tommy pressed the UP button. But the elevator monitors told him that all the cars were on higher floors.



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Tommy walked over to a nearby chair and slumped into it. Things were not looking good. They weren't looking good at all. He put his head in his hands, wishing he'd never gotten up that morning. What was he going to do now?

He didn't have much time to think about it, because a second later he felt a tap on his shoulder. Tommy looked up, and right into the very angry face of Rusty Rodgers. Standing next to him was a tall, thin man who looked even more perturbed—if that were possible. Tommy didn't need to read his name tag to know that it was Mr. Snuffington.

"I'd like to see you in my office," the thin man said, giving Tommy a withering glare. "Now."

"The game's up," Rusty added.

Tommy got to his feet and followed the men into the manager's office. *Well, at least I know that things can't get any worse,* he told himself. In the last ten minutes, his whole world had fallen apart!

## chapter

# 13

"**S**he was blond and sophisticated, and he was holding her hand!" Lindsay sobbed. She was up in the girls' room telling Megan and Rachel about what she'd just seen in the lobby.

"Really?" Rachel asked. "What was she wearing—was it totally hip?"

Megan shot Rachel a dirty look.

"I mean, I'm sure she looked like a total dork," Rachel corrected herself.

"Are you sure Tommy was holding her hand?" Megan asked, giving Lindsay a tissue. That didn't sound like something Tommy would do. He was totally nuts about Lindsay. "Maybe the girl was just handing him something."



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Lindsay shook her head. "They were holding hands, for sure," she said firmly. Then she blew her nose.

Megan and Rachel exchanged glances. This didn't look good.

"Let's start at the beginning," Megan said, sitting down next to Lindsay on the bed. "Tell us everything weird that happened today."

"Well, first the boys pretended to be sick this morning," Lindsay said with a snuffle. "At least I *think* they were pretending, because after breakfast I thought I saw them in the lobby wearing bellboy hats."

"Bellboy hats?" Rachel asked. "That doesn't make any sense."

Lindsay nodded. "I know," she said. "That's why I thought I was mistaken at the time. But then there was no answer when I called this afternoon. And when I knocked on the boys' door, Brian acted all weird and wouldn't let Tommy talk to me."

"What a creep," Rachel muttered.

"Then there's the shampoo and stuff that they borrowed," Lindsay went on. "And the fact that their room smells like a wet dog!"

"Don't forget the note," Megan put in.

Lindsay wiped her eyes. "I wish I could!" she exclaimed sadly. "That and the blond girl in the lobby. Tommy's probably ogling her long, blond hair right this minute!"

## It's the Thought That Counts

o o o

In Mr. Snuffington's office, Tommy was having a difficult time taking his eyes off the manager's bald spot. Beside him, Brian was staring at the floor.

"I'm sure you boys realize that what you've done is wrong," Mr. Snuffington was saying in a flat tone.

Tommy shot Brian a look. Hadn't he said something like that when Brian had first come up with this crazy idea? "We're aware of that, sir," Tommy said. "But we didn't mean to cause any trouble."

Mr. Snuffington's eyebrows shot up. "Really?" he said. "Just what were you trying to do, then?"

Tommy sighed, realizing that it was time for the truth.

"We were trying to make some money so I could buy my girlfriend an anniversary present," he said. "See, I'm not exactly the greatest boyfriend—I forget stuff all the time. I forgot our anniversary, until Lindsay—she's my girlfriend—told me that she'd bought me the perfect present. I totally freaked out!"

"We found out what she wanted," Brian put in calmly. "But the earrings cost over a hundred dollars."

Rusty let out a low whistle. "That's pretty steep," he said.

"Totally steep," Tommy agreed. "But you should have seen them. They were gorgeous. And would've



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looked awesome on Lindsay—she's my girlfriend," he told them for a second time.

"So we've heard," Mr. Snuffington said. He didn't look like he was softening. Not one bit.

"Oh . . . right," Tommy said sheepishly. He wiped his sweaty palms on his khakis. Getting into trouble was no fun! He wondered how Brian could look so calm.

"We were desperate to make the money, sir," Brian explained. "When Tommy was trying on the bellman's cap in the lobby, two girls mistook us for bellboys. Well, one thing led to another. We figured we could earn the money by toting luggage and running errands. As my friend said, we didn't mean any harm."

"Though I disapprove of their actions," Rusty said, "they were helpful during a busy time in the hotel."

*They obviously haven't spoken to Ms. Cummings,* Tommy thought. *Thank goodness!*

"I realize that, Mr. Rodgers," Mr. Snuffington said stiffly. "But we cannot have guests impersonating our staff." He drummed his fingers on his desk in thought. He looked at Brian. Then he looked at Tommy.

*He's not budging,* Tommy thought. "I know it was dumb of us," he said desperately. "I guess we just weren't thinking. But we're sorry."

Mr. Snuffington sighed. "I suppose I could overlook the matter . . .," he began.

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Brian looked at Tommy and grinned. "Thank you," Brian said.

*... if you give back the money you've made."*

"But—" Brian started to protest.

"Of course, sir," Tommy interrupted. Was Brian nuts? Did he actually think they had bargaining power? Tommy reached into his pocket and handed over the money. A moment later, Brian reluctantly did the same.

"I assume I don't have to worry about the rest of your stay at the Cartwright," Mr. Snuffington said, giving the boys meaningful glances.

"No, of course not," Tommy said.

"Good."

Tommy and Brian were excused, and they made their way into the lobby.

"What a drag," Brian said as he pushed the UP button on the elevator. "We just lost a whole day's worth of tips—not to mention half of our vacation in San Francisco."

"We're lucky Snuffington didn't call the cops," Tommy said. "Besides, I was glad to finally tell someone the truth."

Brian looked at Tommy as if he was a lunatic. "Are you crazy?" he asked. "We just lost over a hundred dollars, and you're *glad*?"

Tommy shrugged. "I was sick of lying," he said.



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"And now I'm going to tell somebody else the truth."

The elevator doors opened on the fourth floor and Tommy strode down the hall with Brian at his heels. When he got to the girls' room, Tommy took a deep breath. Then he raised his fist and knocked.

Megan opened the door. Her hands on her hips, she glared at Tommy.

"I need to talk to Lindsay," Tommy said.

"She doesn't want to talk—"

"It's okay, Megan," Lindsay said from inside the room. "You can let him in."

Tommy let out a sigh of relief. At least she was willing to listen. He and Brian stepped into the room.

But when Tommy saw Lindsay's face, his heart leaped to his throat. Her face was red and blotchy. She looked completely miserable.

"What do you want?" she asked in a wooden voice.

"Lindsay, it's not what you think," Tommy said. He wanted to rush forward and give her a giant hug, but he knew he couldn't. "That was just some girl who thought I was a bellboy."

"So that *was* you," Megan said.

"Where's my shampoo and hair dryer?" Rachel put in.

"And what about that weird note?" Lindsay asked. Her lower lip jutted out in a pout.

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*The note?* Tommy's forehead wrinkled in confusion. He was sure that note was the one *right* thing he'd done all day. "You didn't like it?"

"Of course not!" Lindsay said, exasperated. "You said I was old and gray!"

*Old and gray?* Tommy thought. *That wasn't what I wrote.* Then he realized what must have happened. Lindsay got the note he'd written for Ethel!

"You guys have a lot of explaining to do," Megan said. She folded her arms across her chest. "And it better be good."

Ten minutes later, Tommy and Brian had told the entire story. Lindsay had frowned through the first half, but by the time Tommy got to the part about giving Olive a bath, she was grinning in spite of herself.

"It was only because I wanted to get you the perfect gift," Tommy said seriously. He went and sat down next to Lindsay on the bed. "Things just got way out of control."

"I should be furious with you, Tommy DeLuca," Lindsay said scoldingly. Then her face broke into a smile. "But mostly I'm glad that you'd go through all that just for me!"

"Are you kidding?" Tommy said as he reached for her hand. "I'd go through it *twice*."

"Please don't!" Lindsay exclaimed.



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They smiled at each other, and Tommy leaned in and gave her a soft kiss that made Lindsay's knees go weak. "The second part of the note was right, anyway," he whispered.

Lindsay beamed. Under his tough exterior, Tommy was a total honey!

"I want you guys to know that I expect you to replace my stuff—including the curlers," Rachel said. She totally shattered the romantic moment.

"When I get some money, I'll personally escort you to the drugstore so you can buy whatever you want," Brian said gallantly.

"Really?" Rachel's eyes lit up. "When will you get some money? The year 2006?"

Just then there was a knock on the door.

"I'll get it," Brian said. He ambled over to the door and opened it to find . . .

Ms. Cummings!

"H-h-hello," he said nervously. Was she going to yell at him all over again? Behind him, the girls were giggling at the sight of the dog. And Tommy looked as if he was about to faint.

*Does she want me to apologize a second time?* Brian wondered. But before he had a chance to say anything, Ms. Cummings and Olive stepped into the room. Standing there in the middle of everyone, Ms. Cummings cleared her throat. "I came to

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tell you something," she began.

"Ms. Cummings," Brian began pleadingly. "I'm really sorry—"

"I didn't come here to get another apology," she replied crisply. Then she broke into a wide grin. "I came to give one!"

"What?" everyone said at once.

"Olive won the 'most original' prize at the show!" she explained happily.

"*Original* would describe it," Rachel said.

"And since you boys were responsible for her utterly original hairdo, I think that half of the prize money belongs to you."

"Prize money?" Brian echoed in disbelief.

Ms. Cummings nodded. She handed Brian a white envelope filled with bills. "A hundred and twenty-five dollars," she said.

"Wow," Tommy said.

"No way," Megan added.

"Way," Ms. Cummings said with a grin. "It's been quite a day," she added, looking around at the kids. "I'm not sure I'd want to do it again."

Olive let out a bark.

"And I'm not sure Olive would, either!"



chapter

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"I can't believe you gave us some of the prize money, Ms. Cummings," Tommy said. "It was really nice of you." The gang was gathered around Olive, petting her curls.

"Yeah," Brian agreed. "Thanks."

Before Ms. Cummings could reply, there was a knock on the door.

"This place is like Grand Central Station," Megan mumbled as Screech and Bobby stuck their heads through the opening.

"Hey, guys," Lindsay said. "How'd it go?"

Rachel jumped to her feet. "Did you win?"

Bobby shook his head and the girls gasped.

"Those creepy boys won?" Megan asked incredulously.

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"Hey, one of those creepy boys was a hunk," Rachel objected with a giggle.

"Not exactly," Screech said mysteriously.

"Screech, the suspense is killing us!" Megan exclaimed. "What happened?"

"Remember the old ladies with the flowered hats?" Bobby asked.

"They won?" Lindsay said. "I don't believe it!"

"Wel-l-l-l-l," Bobby said. "It's a long story, but we sort of *let* them win."

"No way," Rachel said.

"Really?" Lindsay asked.

Megan didn't say anything. She was too surprised to speak.

"Sure," Bobby said with a shrug. "After all, winning isn't everything."

"Now, where have I heard that before?" Megan asked with a smile.

"That was really nice of you guys," Lindsay said. "I'm proud of both of you."

"So am I," Ms. Cummings added. "And I don't even know you!"

Everyone laughed, and Brian introduced Ms. Cummings to Bobby and Screech. Then Bobby pulled out the chocolate bars Marie and Serina had given them and shared them with everyone. Finally, Ms. Cummings invited everyone out



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for dinner at her favorite restaurant.

"Tommy and I would love to, but we already have dinner plans of our own. It's our anniversary." She reached over and gave her boyfriend's hand a squeeze.

"I understand," Ms. Cummings said.

"But the rest of us would love to," Brian added.

"Good," Ms. Cummings said, getting to her feet. "Let's meet in the lobby at seven o'clock." She picked up Olive's leash and moved toward the door. "Right now I have some errands to run."

"That reminds me," Tommy said with a grin. "Brian and I have some things to take care of, too." He leaned in and gave Lindsay a kiss on the cheek. "I'll pick you up at seven," he said.

Tommy started for the door, but Rachel grabbed onto Brian's arm.

"I'm ready for our trip to the drugstore now," she said, batting her eyelashes at him.

Brian rolled his eyes. Knowing Rachel, they'd spend an hour in the shampoo aisle alone! *But at least I'll get to spend a little time with the girl of my dreams!*

o o o

Later that night, Tommy came to Lindsay's door carrying a bouquet of mixed flowers. Dressed in a sport coat, tie, black jeans, and cowboy boots, he looked extra handsome.

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"Let's exchange presents now," Lindsay suggested. She closed the door behind him. She couldn't wait to see what Tommy had bought for her—even if it was the thought that counted.

"Okay," Tommy agreed. He pulled a small box out of his jacket pocket. "You first."

Lindsay took the package and slowly untied the ribbon. She loved presents—especially presents from Tommy. She wanted to savor every moment.

When Lindsay opened the tiny box and saw what was inside, she gave a little squeal. "Oh, Tommy," she said, holding them up so the light glinted off the shiny silver. "How did you know?"

Tommy grinned. "Just a little detective work," he said.

Lindsay put the earrings on right away, then got up to look at herself in the mirror. "Wow," she said. "They totally go with my outfit." It was true. Lindsay was wearing a light blue dress, and it matched the blue stones in the earrings perfectly.

Suddenly Lindsay's face fell. "I'm afraid my present isn't this great," she said.

Tommy reached for her hand. "It doesn't matter," he said. "I've got you, and that's all I could ever want."

Lindsay blushed. Tommy didn't get this romantic very often, so she wasn't that used to it. Not



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that she was complaining. She loved it!

She pulled a rolled-up present out of her suitcase. "Here it is," she said, handing it over. Tommy held the present up to his ear and shook it.

"Hmm," he said. "It doesn't rattle."

Lindsay swatted him playfully. "Come on," she said. "Open it."

Tommy shredded the paper and saw that it was one of his favorite magazines—*Cars and Parts*—along with a note that said he was getting a two-year subscription. "All right!" he exclaimed. He flipped open the glossy magazine. "This is great, Linds." He leaned over and gave her a kiss, and Lindsay smiled happily.

"I guess we'd better get going," he said, glancing at his watch. "Our reservation is for seven-thirty."

"Where are we going?" Lindsay asked.

"To an Italian place that Screech recommended," Tommy replied. He took her arm, and they left the hotel, then caught a taxi to the restaurant.

"I think I'm going to have pasta," Lindsay said as the cab came to a halt in front of a quaint little building perched on Hyde Street. A sign on the door told her that the restaurant was called Frascati.

A few moments later, Tommy and Lindsay pulled open the door to the restaurant. But what they saw inside made Tommy stop dead in his tracks. The whole gang—Ms. Cummings included—was sitting at

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a big table in the middle of the dining room!

*I can't believe this!* Tommy groaned inwardly. *Of all the restaurants in the whole city, we had to pick the same one!* "Lindsay, let's go someplace—" Tommy started to say. But he got cut off.

"Hey, look who's here!" Brian exclaimed, pointing toward the door. Everyone turned to look at Tommy and Lindsay.

Lindsay grabbed Tommy's hand and pulled him toward the table. "We can go out for a romantic dessert and a walk along the wharf later," she whispered as the rest of the gang laughed about the coincidence.

"Hi, guys," Megan said with a grin.

"What are you doing here?" Rachel asked. She looked a little confused.

"Having dinner, silly!" Screech said.

"Pull up some chairs," Bobby put in. "The food in this place is terrific!"



**SAVED  
BY THE  
BELL**

## The New Class

### It's the Thought That Counts

It's going to be the greatest weekend ever! The gang is cashing in on their *Smarts and Strength* victory prize—an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco!

Tommy can't wait to finally spend some quality time with his sweetie, Lindsay. And when she reminds him that it's their anniversary, he vows to get her the perfect gift. There's just one little problem . . . he's totally broke!

Meanwhile, Bobby and Screech are competing in a local contest for the chance to name a candy bar and get a year's supply of chocolate. But they've got some stiff competition—two old ladies in flowered hats!

Will Tommy get the cash for Lindsay's present? Will Bobby and Screech lose to a couple of adorable senior citizens?

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